Weird Tales

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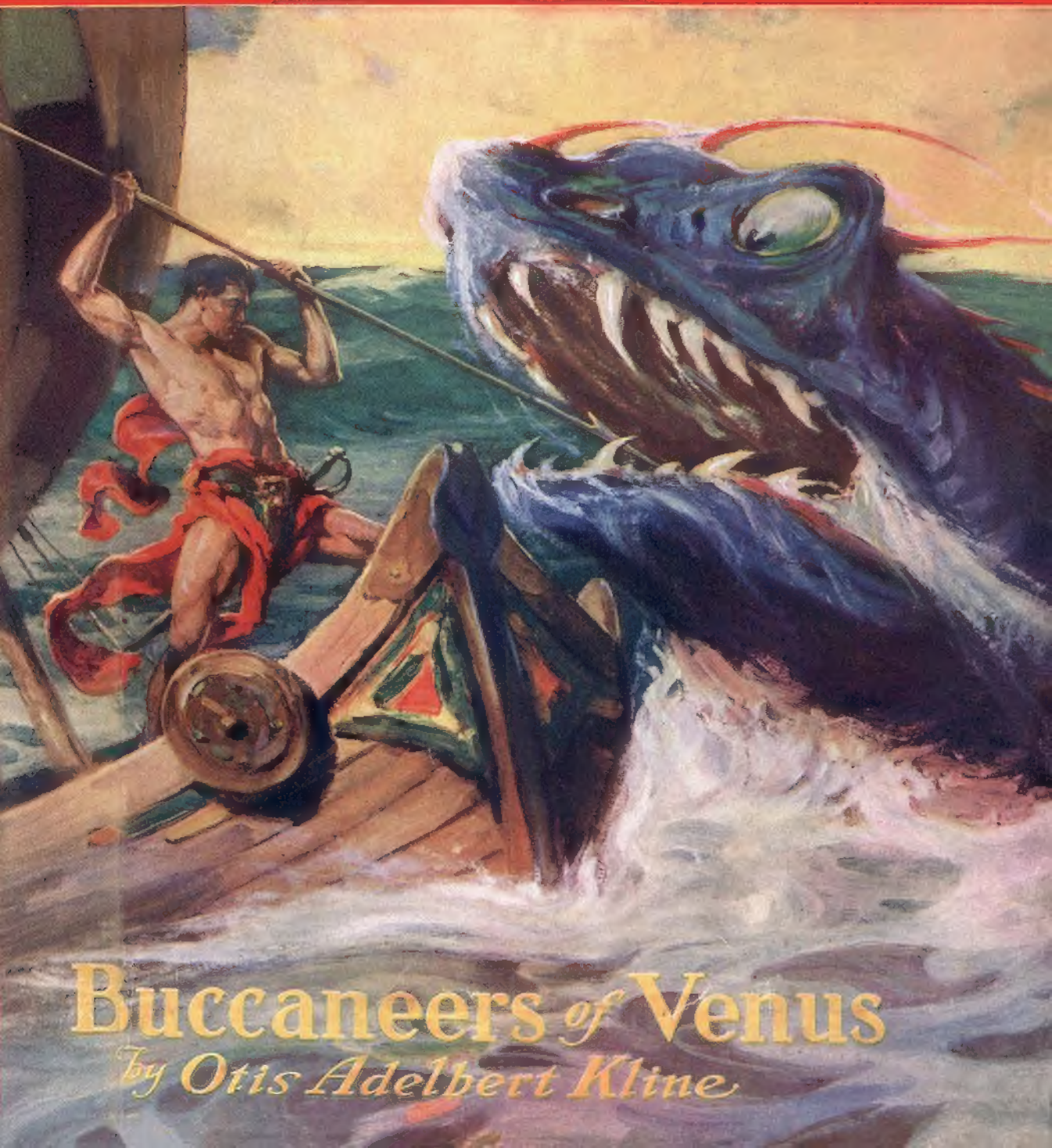

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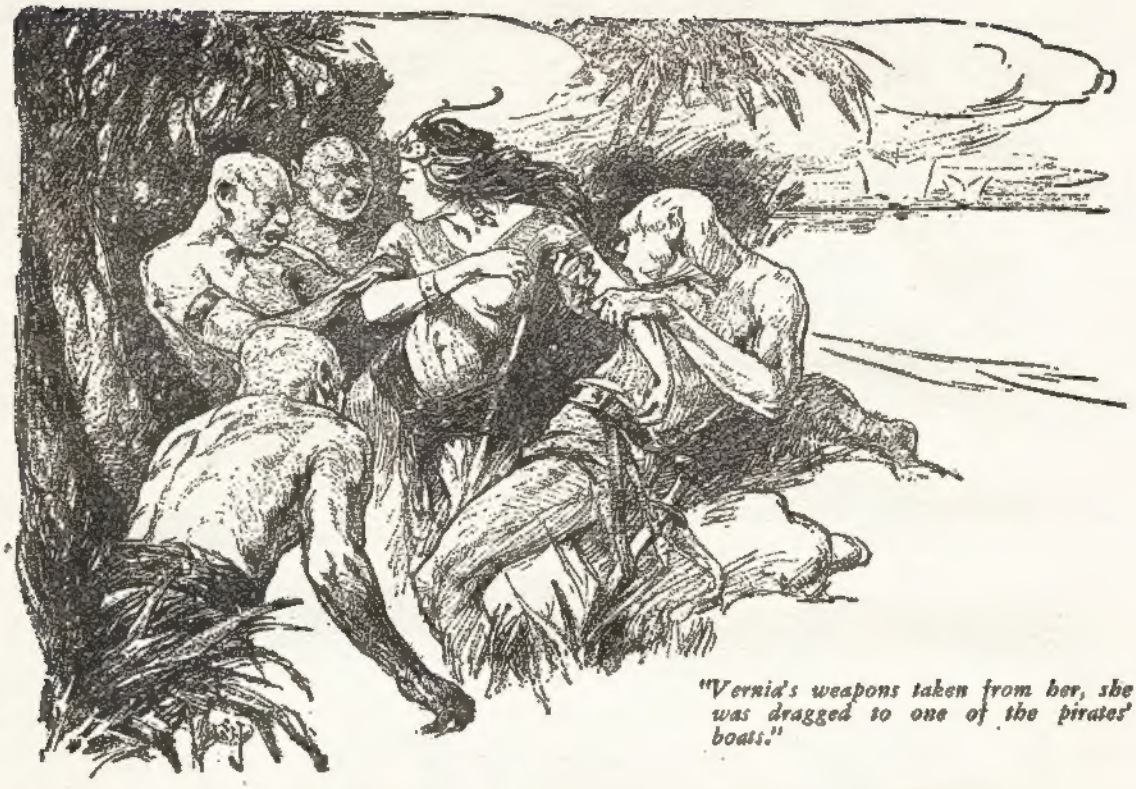


"Vernia's weapons taken from her, she was dragged to one of the pirates' boats."

Buccaneers of Venus

By OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

A powerful weird-scientific story by a master of science-fiction—a swift-moving tale of piracy, and weird monsters on another planet

FOREWORD

HOW it happened that Robert Grandon of Earth became ruler over Reabon, most populous and mightiest empire on the planet Venus, is a story in itself. How he reached Zorovia (as Venus is called); how he came to ascend the throne after countless daring feats of valor; how he wooed and won Vernia, the lovely young Torrogina of Reabon; and how his friend, Harry Thorne, adventurer of three worlds, under the name of Zinlo, became ruler over Olba, another powerful empire of Venus—all this, while intensely interesting, is not essential to your enjoyment of the present story, which concerns itself with a weird people called the Huitsenni, a buccaneering race that existed through piratical raids in overwhelming numbers against the civilized nations of Zorovia. Suffice it to say that as this story opens we find Grandon of Terra firmly established on the throne of Reabon, and about to leave on his honeymoon with the beautiful Vernia. THE EDITORS.

CHAPTER 1

THE PIRATES STRIKE

"THE power of Huitsen must be broken, and broken for ever." Thus spoke Aardvan, brawny, bull-necked Torrogo of Adonijar, banging his huge fist on the table for emphasis, and causing the kova cups to dance and rattle.

Robert Grandon, former Chicago clubman who had fought his way to the throne of Reabon, mightiest empire of Venus, grimly nodded his assent, as did his two other guests, Ad, Torrogo of Tyrhana, and Zinlo, Torrogo of Olba. For the sake of privacy, he had dispensed with the formality of the throne room, and received them in the drawing-room of his personal apartments in the imperial palace.

The furniture and decorations of this room would have appeared exceedingly bizarre to earthly eyes. Its paneled walls were hung with strange weapons and stranger trophies of the battlefield and chase—the prized treasures of a soldier and hunter. The skins of marmelots, fiercest felines of the Zorovian fern forests, and the tremendous bear-like monsters known as ramphs, magnificent specimens all, were flung on the floor. A marmelot, carved from red wood and supporting a round top of polished crystal, formed the table at which they sat. The chairs were cut from the same red wood to represent kneeling giants holding the carved scarlet cushions that formed the seats and backs. Cloud-filtered sunlight entered through two immense windows that reached from floor to ceiling, opening on a private balcony which overlooked the palace gardens.

Ad of Tyrhana stroked his square-cut, jet-black beard meditatively. Then he turned to Grandon. "I fear we have disturbed you at a most inopportune time," he said. "A man about to start on a honeymoon should not be annoyed with affairs of state. It was only after we had learned of the latest outrage perpetrated by the yellow pirates, that Aardvan and I, who were awaiting Zinlo's return to Olba, decided to ask his Romojak, Lotar, to bring us here in one of his swift airships.

"When we heard that one of my ships of war, crippled by a storm and half sinking, was set upon by these yellow fiends, part of its crew massacred and the rest carried off prisoners, and my daughter Narine taken to I know not what fate, we felt that something must be done, and done quickly."

"And I heartily agree with you," said Grandon. "The imperial navy of Reabon is at your disposal. What action do you suggest?"

"I felt sure you would come in with us," said Ad, "especially after my talk with Zinlo this morning. As I have previously intimated, we must make our plans in secret, and carry them out as unobtrusively as possible. The Huitsenni have spies everywhere. Because of their peculiar physical characteristics they can not do any eavesdropping among us themselves, but they have the treasure wherewith to hire the vile traitors among our people who will sell their honor for gain.

"We should have two main objectives: to sink or capture every pirate ship that sails the seas of Zorovia, and to find and take the secret port of Huitsen. It is a port of missing ships and treasure, of slaves who were once citizens of our own and other lands, a port of peril to every man, woman and child on this planet."

"Have you any idea where to look for this hidden port?" asked Grandon.

"We have no definite knowledge of its location, but believe it lies somewhere toward the south, this because pirate fleets leaving a scene of pillage have almost in-

variably been observed to sail southward."

"I believe my flyers can locate it," said Zinlo, toying with his kova cup.

"It's a big world," boomed the gruff Aardvan, "and it will take a deal of flying, sailing and marching to explore it all."

"Perhaps Mernerum will help us," suggested Ad.

"I take it," replied Grandon, "that you are unaware of the strained, or rather, severed relations between Mernerum and Reabon. Only this morning I ordered diplomatic relations severed with Zanaloth of Mernerum, because of his affront to my wife when she passed through his dominions some time ago."

"We can do well enough without that dissolute old rake," said Zinlo. "But we're keeping you from that honeymoon trip, Grandon. I understand that your expedition was ready to march when Ad and Aardvan arrived."

"We'll give it up," Grandon told them. "I'm sure Vernia won't mind."

"See here," Ad protested. "We don't want *such* a sacrifice. Only let us take a few of your ships for the present, and some warriors and munitions, in case a landing-party is required. Go on your honeymoon. Later, when we've discovered the port of peril, we'll notify you, and let you in at the kill."

"But your daughter has been stolen. Every man on this planet, worthy of the name, should be willing to assist in the search."

Ad sighed deeply. "Alas," he replied, "I fear all search for her will be vain. She has been gone for so long, now, that I can only hope to avenge her. But, of course, I, her father, shall continue to search." He arose, and continued: "My friends and allies, we have imposed long enough on this patient young bridegroom. I'm sure you will all agree with me when I say that we don't want his help until after the honeymoon. Let him lend us a few ships and men now, and we'll call on him later."

"Those are precisely my sentiments," roared the deep-voiced Aardvan, also rising.

"And mine," echoed Zinlo. "And so, Grandon, we'll go down and join the group outside, that's waiting to see you off. By the way, whither are you bound?"

"It was a toss-up whether to go to the wild mountain fastnesses of Uxpo, or enjoy the bathing, fishing and boating on the Azpok coast. But the seashore won, and we chose a camping-place on a wild and unfrequented part of the coast."

"Splendid! See you outside."

A half-hour later, speeded by their many friends, and by an immense multitude that had lined the streets of Reabon to see them off, Grandon and his charming young bride, Vernia, Princess of Reabon, stepped into the waiting, one-wheeled motor vehicle, and with their guard of fighting Traveks, left for the coast.

IN THE imperial tent of scarlet silk, decked with cloth-of-gold insignia and edged with golden fringe, Grandon opened his eyes as the first faint dawn-light appeared, for he had planned an early morning fishing-trip. He arose and dressed silently, so as not to disturb the slumber of his bride, but she heard the slight clank of his sword as he was about to step through the doorway, and wakened.

"Bob."

He turned as she softly pronounced the name by which he had been known to his friends on Earth, the name he had taught her to call him, and which he loved to hear her say with her quaint, Reabonian accent.

With three steps he was at her bedside. She smiled up at him, the pink and white oval of her face framed in the wealth of golden ringlets that all but concealed her silken pillow. Then she held up both arms.

"Would you leave without kissing me good-bye?" she asked reproachfully.

Contritely, he knelt beside the bed and took her in his arms.

"I didn't want to disturb your morning sleep, sweetheart," he said, and added: "I was only going out for a little while to have a try at a killer norgal. I'm told they bite best at daybreak."

She took his face between her palms, drew it down to hers. Their lips met.

"Never leave me," she said, "without kissing me good-bye. Who knows how long any separation may be? Even though we may expect to be parted for but a few moments, the hand of Providence may intervene and separate us for a long time —perhaps for eternity."

He buried his face in the soft curve of her neck as she ran her fingers through his crisp, black curls. Nor did he dream, as he held her thus for a few moments, how soon the dire prophecy in her words was to be fulfilled.

"I'll be back in a jiffy, little bride of mine," he said, as he stood erect a few moments later.

She watched him, love and pride in her eyes, as he strode through the door. Her tall, handsome husband, brave, strong, gentle, and an emperor, every inch of him.

Throwing a shimmering, diaphanous wrap of scarlet material around her, she went to the door of the tent to watch him depart. Two guards saluted stiffly as she appeared. They were members of a company of Grandon's crack troops, the Fighting Traveks from Uxpo. They were armed with torks[1], scarbos[2] and long-bladed spears.

Vernia watched him as he stood beside his small fishing-boat for a few moments, in earnest conversation with Huba, mojak or captain of the company of Traveks who were guarding the camp, while six men stood on each side of the little craft, holding her nose into the breakers. In the prow of the boat was Kantar the Gunner, carefully shielding his mattork —a weapon resembling a tork but of considerably heavier caliber and longer range, and mounted on a tripod—from the spray that was breaking over the bow, by holding a waterproof silk cover over it.

The other members of the crew were six rowers, a man who had charge of the sail, and another who held the tiller.

Having finished his conversation with Huba, Grandon leaped into the craft, and the twelve men who were standing in the water launched her. When they reached water up to their necks, they let go, and the rowers plied their oars vigorously. Presently the sail went up, and the little boat tacked into the breeze, which was just lively enough to stir the fog that hung low over the surface of the Azpok.

THE princess watched the boat until the mists had swallowed it up, then turned and re-entered her tent. But scarcely, it seemed, had she crept once more beneath her warm covers, and closed her eyes in sleep, ere there sounded outside the crack of a mattork, the shouts of men, and the clank of weapons, followed by a fusillade of shots that told her the camp was being attacked by a considerable body of armed men.

Jumping out of bed, Vernia called to the guard outside.

[1] Rapid-fire weapons that shoot needle-like glass projectiles by means of compressed charges of a highly explosive gas ignited by an electric spark.

[2] Cutting and thrusting weapons with basket hilts and blades curved like those of simitars.

"What is it?" she asked. "What has happened?"

"Pirates, Your Majesty!" replied the guard excitedly. "We are attacked by the raiders of the coast!"

She dressed as swiftly as possible, buckling the jeweled belt which held her small tork and scarbo around her slender waist. Meanwhile, the sounds of fighting drew closer and closer to the scarlet tent.

As soon as she was dressed, Vernia drew her scarbo and stepped fearlessly from the tent. Descended from a thousand fighting Torrogos, or Emperors of Reabon, and as great a general as any of them, she was fully as brave as her mighty husband, even though she lacked his strength and uncanny skill in swordsmanship. With flashing eyes she surveyed the scene before her. Tugging at their anchors, less than a quarter of a mile from land, were a score of vessels which she instantly recognized, from pictures she had seen, as the ships of the dreaded yellow pirates, the scourge of the Azpok Ocean. Their peculiar sails, branching out on either side of the mast like the wings of bats, instantly identified them. And coming rapidly shoreward were no less than fifty boats loaded with armed men, each mounting a mattork in the bow. But this was not all, for converging on the camp from both sides and the rear was an immense horde of yelling, shooting pirates. Already, more than a third of the Fighting Traveks had fallen, and the tork and mattork fire from all directions was rapidly decimating the ranks of those who remained.

A dozen of the boats were sent down by Huba's mattork gunners before the landing-party reached the shore. As their prows grounded, the remaining pirates leaped out and charged the camp. It was a signal for a general advance from all directions.

The camp had been guarded by two hundred men, but by the time the charge commenced the terrific tork and mattork fire had cut them down to about forty. They formed a hollow square around the Princess, and met the shock of the attack with a fierce resistance worthy of the traditions of the Fighting Traveks, though it was obvious, from the beginning, that there could be but one outcome.

In the hand-to-hand fighting that followed there was no report of tork or mattork—only the clash of blades, the war-cries of the fighters, the groans of the wounded, and the shrieks of the dying. Vernia and Huba fought bravely with the others, time and again leaping into the gaps left by fallen men until the line could be closed. But they were waging a hopeless fight. Presently there were only the Princess and the mojak left, fighting back to back. The latter, battling three pirates at once, was suddenly cut down by a blow from one of his adversaries, leaving Vernia alone. Then a man leaped in from behind, pinioning her arms, and her weapons were quickly taken from her.

The looting of the camp was already in progress as she was dragged, kicking and struggling, into one of the pirate boats. Everything in the camp except the bodies of the fallen Traveks was quickly loaded into the boats. Even these were stripped of their clothing, weapons and accouterments. The pirates also took with them all of their own dead and wounded.

ROWED to the largest of the pirate vessels, Vernia was carried aboard and taken before an officer whose insignia proclaimed him romojak, or commander of the fleet. Like most of the other men of his race, he was short, scarcely taller than the Princess herself, but with an exceptionally long body and arms. His

round, yellow face was seamed and wrinkled, and his equally round eyes, wide open and staring, were without irises. The pupils were perpendicular slits that opened and closed like those of felines. His short nose resembled the tip of a pig's snout, and there were no teeth in the chinless mouth beneath it, from the corners of which drooled saliva reddened by the juice of the kerra, the spores of a narcotic fungoid growth chewed almost incessantly by the yellow pirates. Nor was there a sign of beard, eyebrows or hair on the face or head, the skin of his body being covered with a greasy exudation, evidently nature's protection for these totally hairless people. Judged by the standards of his hairless, toothless race, he was probably not unhandsome. But to Vernia, facing him as his prisoner, he was a hideous monstrosity.

"I presume you are the Torroga of Reabon," he said in patoa, with the peculiar pronunciation that a lack of teeth induces.

"You have already presumed too much," replied Vernia, spiritedly. "For this day's work I can promise you annihilation of the Yellow Pirates."

The gums of the romojak showed in a toothless grin. He expectorated a red stream of kerra juice, then turned to a short, bow-legged, pot-bellied mojak who stood beside him.

"You hear that, San Thoy?" he mouthed, sneeringly. "I, Thid Yet, Romojak of the navies of Huitsen, have presumed too much!"

The mojak duplicated his kerra-stained grin.

"The Huitsenni never presume too much," he replied.

"Well said, San Thoy," approved the romojak. Then he addressed Vernia once more. "Your Majesty, the Huitsenni presume often, but never too much. Have they ever been beaten in battle? Has one of them ever been led to your court, a prisoner? Have their cities ever been found by pursuing battle fleets? Your Majesty is aware that history can answer but one word to these questions, and that word is: 'No'."

"There is only one reason why it must be so answered," replied Vernia. "Cowardice. You never attack unless your overwhelming numbers assure you of victory. For this reason you never lose battles or prisoners. Your cities have not been found because you are adepts at flight from an enemy. In this there is nothing of which to be proud."

"Your Majesty calls it 'cowardice'," said Thid Yet, "but we of the Huitsenni have a better word. We call it 'cleverness'. However, I am not here to bandy words with you, nor dispute terms. You are my prisoner, captured not for myself, but for another. If you are reasonably docile and do not attempt to escape you will be treated with gentleness and courtesy. If not—whatever misfortune befalls will be upon your own head." He turned to the greasy, pot-bellied mojak beside him. "Take her to her cabin, San Thoy."

CHAPTER 2

PURSUIT

FAR out into the morning mists that shrouded the surface of the blue-gray Azpok, Grandon sailed in search of the largest and most ferocious of all Zorovian game fish—the killer-norgal. Fishing for the norgal was royal sport indeed, and fraught with great danger to the fisherman. Hunting a full-grown man-eating tiger with a lariat could be no more dangerous, and as often as not, the man who lacked skill fell a prey to the fish.

Grandon had never seen a killer-norgal, and so when he felt a sharp tug at his trolling-line and a magnificent specimen

broke water, leaping high in the air and shaking its head to dislodge the hook, he had one of the greatest thrills that had ever come to him, intrepid adventurer though he was. Its body, covered with glistening blue scales and bristling with sharp spines, was about twenty-five feet in length. Its enormous jaws, when distended, revealed row upon row of sharp, back-curved teeth in a maw large enough to take in a dozen men at a single snap.

Kantar the Gunner jerked the oily cover from his mattork, but before he could bring it to bear on the huge fish, it dived out of sight.

Grandon kept a taut line on his quarry while the crew skilfully maneuvered the little craft to follow its eccentric and exceedingly swift motions, as it dragged the boat farther and farther out to sea. After more than an hour of this, the struggles of the monster became slower, showing that it was beginning to tire. During all this time it did not once expose itself to the deadly aim of the watchful Kantar.

Suddenly, without warning, the line slackened, and although Grandon reeled in with all his might, he was unable to pull it taut. He thought the fish had become unhooked at first, but the flash of a dorsal fin, for a moment visible above the waves, and coming swiftly toward the boat, showed him the true situation. Kantar's mattork spoke, and the fin disappeared, but it was not evident whether he had registered a hit.

One of the older sailors, an experienced norgal fisherman, said:

"Beware, Majesty. The killer is about to strike."

Dropping his tackle, Grandon seized an eighteen-foot lance which lay along the gunwale beside him, and poised it expectantly. He had not long to wait, for the enormous jaws suddenly emerged from the water not ten feet from him. He plunged the keen point down the cavernous maw, and Kantar's mattork spoke again and again, while the mighty jaws ground the thick shaft of tough serali wood into splinters. Hurling the useless butt from him, Grandon whipped out his sword, but he sheathed it again, as with a few convulsive flops the great spiny body turned over and floated belly up. The blood which poured out through one of the gills showed that the lance-point had found the heart, and several round holes through the head attested the marksmanship of Kantar.

The sailors were making the prize fast, chattering and laughing the while, when the keen-eared Kantar suddenly said: "Hark! I hear shooting!"

Every voice was instantly hushed, and there came distinctly now, from the north, the sounds of a terrific bombardment.

"The camp is attacked!" cried an old sailor.

"To the oars," ordered Grandon, "and crowd on all sail at once. Cut that fish loose. We must get there as soon as possible."

The huge spiny carcass was cast adrift, and sails and oars were speedily put into use. Yet it seemed to Grandon that the swift little boat, which fairly leaped over the waves under this double propulsion, moved with snail-like slowness.

BEFORE they had gotten half-way back to camp the sounds of firing ceased, and Grandon, goaded by horrible fears for Vernia's safety, fumed and fretted at his inability to make better speed or to see through the mists that made about two hundred yards the limit of visibility.

But when the prow of the little boat grounded on the beach, and leaping out, Grandon discovered the bloody shambles

that had been his camp, strewn with the naked bodies of his brave Traveks, his grief and anger knew no bounds.

"All dead," he said to Kantar, who stood respectfully beside him. "My noble Traveks slaughtered, and Vernia stolen. Who can have done this horrid deed? And what motive? Reabon is at peace with all nations. The camp was not rich in loot."

"There is Zanaloth of Mernerum," replied Kantar. "You have severed diplomatic relations with him. Perhaps this is his answer."

"If Zanaloth has done this thing," said Grandon, "he shall have war, and that speedily—such a war as this planet has never seen. I will wipe Mernerum off the face of the globe, nor will Zanaloth live long to gloat over his evil deeds. But it can not be Zanaloth. The fact that he once affronted the Princess of Reabon when she passed through his country made it imperative that I sever diplomatic relations until full apology had been made. I might have declared war, but did not. Zanaloth should be thankful for this, as the armies of Reabon could crush a dozen Mernerums."

Walking among his dead Traveks and sorrowfully murmuring the names of those he recognized, Grandon presently found his mojak.

"My faithful friend," he said, sadly. "Huba, comrade of many a battle and bivouac." He knelt and laid his hand on the blood-smeared brow of the young officer. "Why, his head is warm!" he exclaimed. "Perhaps a spark of life remains! Fetch water and a flask of kova, quickly, Kantar."

The gunner sped away to the boat. He brought back a flask of the aromatic and stimulating kova from the provision basket and a bailing-scoop of sea-water.

There was a huge gash in the fallen mojak's scalp, and the entire upper part of his face was covered with blood. With hands as gentle as those of a woman, Grandon bathed away the blood. Then, as the eyelids of his young friend flickered, he raised the head and held the flask of kova to the mouth, forcing a small quantity of the liquid between the clenched teeth.

Huba swallowed convulsively, opened his eyes, and looked at Grandon with dull wonder in his gaze.

"You, Majesty!" he said, weakly. "I thought I had been taken to the bosom of Thorth."

"You came near it," replied Grandon, "but the scarbo cut was a glancing one. Where is my wife?"

"The cursed Huitsenni attacked the camp," answered Huba. "My valiant Traveks fought well, but were cut down to the last man. Her Majesty fought with us. When all had been killed around us she and I fought the greasy yellow horde, back to back. Then I was cut down, and knew no more. What a brave little thing she is!" He sank back, exhausted.

"Then those yellow fiends have her," said Grandon. "Their spies have worked swiftly, it seems, and they were swift at reprisal. Where have they taken her? How can I follow?"

"I do not know," replied Huba, "nor do I believe any one does, other than the pirates themselves. They raid the coasts or attack merchant or fishing-ships, then disappear. As they always attack with immensely superior forces, they are never defeated. They always carry away their own dead and wounded, and take care that none of their victims are left alive to tell of their dastardly work. But a few times, men who have been left for dead have revived, even as I was revived, and thus some description of them and their deeds has, from time to time, reached civiliza-

tion. Fleets of the great nations have scoured the seas, looking for their ships and their strongholds, but have found neither. Like the winds of heaven, no one knows whence they come or where they go."

"I'll find Vernia if I have to search every inch of this planet," said Grandon.

"One thing only I recall, which may be of assistance, Majesty," said Huba. "Unfortunately I was unable to see the pirates leave, but every intended victim who has ever escaped them has reported that they sailed southward."

Grandon turned to the mojo of the boat crew.

"Remove all but two pairs of oars," he said, "and prepare to push off. I will sail southward. One man, only, will I take with me. Who would be the man?"

From the wounded Huba to the last of the seamen, all volunteered. After some deliberation, Grandon selected Kantar the Gunner as his companion.

"You will be needed in Reabon," he told Huba. "Go at once to the capital. Tell Vordeen to mobilize the army and double the coast guard and the guard on the Mernerum border. Tell him, also, to divide our war fleet into such sized squadrons as he deems advisable, and assign patrol zones to each squadron so that no part of the Azpok Ocean nor any of its shore line will be left unsearched. Have these patrol fleets search every ship encountered, except those of Tyrhard, Adonijor and Olba. Farewell."

The seamen echoed Huba's cry of: "Farewell, Majesty," as Grandon leaped into the boat and seized the tiller. Kantar, already at the oars, struck out swiftly as soon as the men who shoved them off had got beyond their depth, and a little later, the two raised the sail and tacked into the breeze, which had grown considerably stronger. The fog, too, was rising, so that visibility became almost normal.

For most of the morning they zigzagged southward, but presently the wind veered around, eliminating the necessity for tacking, and greatly accelerating their progress.

At noon each took a turn at the tiller while the other ate his frugal lunch of dried mushrooms and smoked frella meat, washed down with drafts of kova.

Kantar had just finished his lunch, and was closing the watertight container when, with an exclamation of surprize, he suddenly leaned over the gunwale and scooped something from the surface of the water with his hand. It was an empty half of a spore pod, red inside and black outside.

"What have you there?" asked Grandon.

"A kerra pod," replied the gunner.

"And what, pray, is that?"

"The kerra, Majesty," replied the gunner, "is chewed almost universally by the toothless yellow pirates. Where there are kerra spore pods, one may be sure the Huitsenni have been. It is said that they are never willingly without a supply of this habit-forming narcotic, which they constantly mumble except when eating or sleeping. I therefore infer, from finding this kerra pod, that we are on the right trail—that the Huitsenni have passed this way not so long since."

"And do you think there is a possibility of our overtaking them today?"

"I believe, Sire, that there is. This little boat is one of the fleetest on the Azpok—and much swifter than the large ships of war used by the pirates in their raids. They had not been long away from camp when we arrived; so I look for their appearance on the horizon some time this

afternoon if they consistently follow their southward course."

That afternoon Grandon constantly strained his eyes toward the south, but saw only such marine monsters of the Azpok as rose to the top from time to time, or flew above its surface. There was a great variety of web-winged reptiles of divers shapes and colors, some as small as seagulls, and other kinds and species up to the enormous ormf, whose wing-spread was fully fifty feet from tip to tip, and whose great, saw-toothed beak with a pelican-like pouch beneath it was large enough to take in a full-grown man at a single snap. There was also a great profusion of large, white birds with hooked bills and red-tipped wings which, like the flying reptiles, dipped to the surface of the water from time to time for their prey, or dived beneath it, emerging therefrom with squirming, wriggling fish or other marine inhabitants in their beaks.

One huge ormf circled above the little craft for several hours, and Kantar prepared to use his mattork in case of attack, but the monster evidently decided that the creatures in the boat were too dangerous for it to assail, and soared lazily away.

Although they did not sight the ships of the pirates that afternoon, Grandon was encouraged by seeing, from time to time, empty kerra pods on the water, which indicated that they were on the right trail.

"The ships of the accursed Huitsenni," said Kantar as darkness fell, "must be swifter than I thought, or we should have sighted them ere this."

Scarcely had he spoken ere there was a sparkle of dancing lights just above the southern horizon.

"I see lights to the south," said Grandon. "What are they?"

"The ships of Huitsen," replied Kantar, excitedly. "Those are their mast-lights. We will overtake them shortly, now."

"And can you tell which is the flagship?" asked Grandon. "It will probably be on the ship of the leader that Her Majesty is confined."

"I will be able to tell which is the flagship when we get closer," replied Kantar, "by her lights."

"Good. As soon as you can do so, steer for the flagship. Make no noise, and perhaps we can get aboard without being seen. If we can do that——"

His speech was suddenly interrupted by a terrific shock, as the little boat, traveling through the inky darkness in which naught was visible except the dancing mast lights of the pirates, suddenly rammed a huge solid object, throwing both men into the bottom of the boat.

The impact was followed by a terrific roar, and the front end of the fishing-boat was lifted out of the water as easily as if it had been a floating chip, while Grandon and Kantar, unable even to see what they had struck, clung to such solid objects as they could grasp and breathlessly awaited the next move of the unseen monster.

CHAPTER 3

THE CUNNING OF SAN THOY

As San Thoy led Vernia to the cabin which had been assigned to her, his great round eyes, with their cat-like pupils, appraised her in a manner that made her fearful.

"Beauteous white princess," he said, when they were out of earshot of Thid Yet and the group of pirates surrounding him, "you are surrounded by enemies, yet San Thoy would be your friend."

Weighing his look and words for a moment, Vernia asked:

"Just what do you mean?"

The slit pupils of his eyes narrowed, and this did not escape the observation of the Princess as he replied:

"I mean what I say, Majesty, in all sincerity. For the great respect and admiration I bear His Majesty, your husband, I would befriend you."

"You know my husband?"

"Only through the echoes of his mighty exploits, which have penetrated even to Huitsen," he replied. "But one brave man admires another, and feels a certain kinship with him. For his sake, as well as for your own, I would be of assistance to you."

"In what way?"

"If you will give me your full trust and co-operation, I can help you to escape. If not, you will shortly be sold into slavery to a human monster whose mistreatment of the women who fall into his lascivious clutches has made him notorious throughout the length and breadth of Zorovia."

"Who?"

"I am under orders not to divulge his name, but we of the Huitsenni were offered an enormous sum in treasure and slaves for your safe delivery to him. It was for this reason and no other that our Rogo decided to brave the anger of the mighty fighter who is your husband, and send a fleet to capture you at the wild and lonely spot where the spies of this licentious potentate had ascertained that you were but indifferently guarded."

"It seems strange," said Vernia, "that this dissolute monarch, whose name I believe I can guess, did not send his own ruffians instead of employing the Huitsenni."

"He feared the power of Reabon," replied San Thoy. "Any evidence which his own men might have left as to their presence on Reabonian soil would have led to war and the inevitable dissolution of his empire. For who can stand against the mighty hosts of Reabon? But who could criticize his perfectly legal action were he to buy a beautiful white slave-girl from the Huitsenni? And even though she should maintain that she were the Torroga of Reabon, what weight has the word of a slave? A thousand beautiful slave-girls might make the same assertion for their own advantage and advancement and he would be legally privileged to disbelieve them. The man who ordered your capture, Majesty, is as clever as he is lecherous."

Vernia, who was familiar with the international laws of Venus, knew full well that no man could be held responsible under those laws for purchasing a slave. She knew, also, that it would be difficult to establish the fact in an international court that he was cognizant of the identity of that slave, whose word would have no legal weight, and could be doubted by him with impunity.

"Just what," she asked, "is your price?"

"My price is but a trifle," he responded. "In fact it is scarcely worth mentioning."

"Name it."

"I should prefer to rescue you first."

They were standing before the door of the cabin to which he had led her, and which he had not yet unlocked. Both suddenly saw Thid Yet, Romojak of the fleet, rounding a curve in the deck and coming swiftly toward them.

Quickly unlocking the door, San Thoy said:

"The Romojak comes. Go into your cabin, and I will call later."

VERNIA stepped into a tiny cabin, which contained a sleeping-shelf that projected from the wall like the nest of a cave swallow, a small table, and a stool, both fastened to the floor. A ewer and

a small bowl for washing were set in a niche in the wall.

As the door closed and the lock clicked behind her, she heard the approaching Thid Yet say:

"By what devious route did you take the prisoner to her cabin, San Thoy, that she but entered it now?"

"I stood and talked to her for a moment, to cheer her," replied San Thoy humbly.

"To cheer her? Ha! So this little beauty has aroused your libidinous fancy! But it was to be expected. Understand me, once and for all. This is no common slave-girl, San Thoy. Her ransom is the price of a mighty empire, and she must be delivered unharmed. Let me but suspect you, and you shall die—very slowly and very painfully—mojak though you be."

"You misapprehend, Excellency," protested San Thoy. "Because I have spent my hard-earned treasure for a few slave-girls in the past, I pray you misjudge not my intentions toward this one. I was moved to pity for her, that was all."

"You pity? Pah! Into your cabin with you, and lay our course, that we may reach Huitsen as soon as possible. And do not forget my warning."

A moment later, Vernia heard the door of the cabin which was next to hers, slam with quite unnecessary violence, and after laving her face and hands with scented water from the ewer, she lay down on her sleeping-shelf to rest, and to overcome the giddiness which the rocking of the ship was beginning to induce. But bad as were the qualms of seasickness, they were as nothing compared to her mental anguish, for she felt that only a miracle could save her. Although she had never been deceived by San Thoy's protestations of friendship, she had been half ready to believe that an offer of treasure might win his help. But the words of the Romojak had thoroughly dissipated even that slim hope.

San Thoy himself brought her food and a bowl of kova, late that afternoon. Because of her seasickness she could not eat the food, but drank the hot, steaming kova. Shortly thereafter she began to feel unaccountably drowsy, and soon fell into a deep sleep.

When she awakened, Vernia felt the craft beneath her lurching and pitching violently. She put out a hand for the light-switch but there was none. Instead, her hand touched the wet gunwale of a small boat, in the bottom of which she was lying. She sat up and the salt spray sprinkled her face. Far away, she saw a number of mast-lights twinkling. A short, bulky figure loomed between her and them in the darkness.

"Who are you?" she asked in terror. "Where are you taking me?"

"Have no fear, Majesty," mouthed the figure. "San Thoy, your slave, has rescued you."

"You drugged me."

"For your own sake, Majesty. You might otherwise have made an outcry when I came to carry you off, thus arousing the ship and defeating your rescue."

"And you will take me back to Reabon at once?"

"In the morning. Tonight we must seek shelter. The surface of the Azpok swarms with fierce and mighty monsters, which by day seek their dark lairs in the ocean's depths. Night travel in a small boat is extremely dangerous. Hark! I hear the breakers now. The island is not far off."

Steering entirely by the sounds that came to him—for nothing was visible in the pitchy blackness—San Thoy brought the little sailboat through booming breakers which evidently covered a bar or

sunken reef, and into comparatively calm water. It was not long after, that the keel rasped on a gravelly shore.

Leaping into the shallow water, the pirate dragged the boat high up on the beach. Then he furled the sail, and taking Vernia by the hand, said:

"Come. I will take you to a place where you may safely spend the night. In the morning I will call for you and take you to Reabon."

"You will be well rewarded," replied Vernia. "I will double the ransom which was offered for me, and add to it a thousand kantols of land, and the purple* for life."

"Your Majesty is generous," said San Thoy, "but then I have cut myself off from my own people, property and position to effect your rescue."

He led her up a narrow winding path, where leaves, dripping with the night dew, brushed her face and body. Presently they came to a small clearing.

San Thoy fumbled with a latch for a moment, then opened a door. He released Vernia's hand and struck a light, using a small flame-maker he carried. With this he lighted a torch that hung from a bracket on the wall, and Vernia saw that they were in a tiny cabin which contained a sleeping-shelf, a crude table, three chairs, some utensils, and a cooking-place, beside which fuel was piled.

"Your slave will light the fire for you, that you may dry your clothing," said San Thoy, "and that he may brew kova."

VERNIA seated herself on one of the chairs and watched his broad, greasy back, as the pirate squatted before the fire. When he had it blazing, he took a kettle and went outside for water. Into this he dropped some kova roots which he found on a shelf beside the fireplace, and soon had it boiling. As Vernia watched him she wondered if his intentions were as magnanimous as he pretended, or if he were as perfidious as the words of his commander implied. So far, his impassive features had betrayed nothing. Only time would tell.

Presently he placed a chair for her before the fire, that she might dry her clothing, and poured her a bowl of steaming kova. While she slowly sipped the hot, stimulating beverage, he tossed off bowl after bowl until the pot was empty and another had been set to brewing, and she noticed that with each bowl the feline slits in his round eyes became more bestial. San Thoy was getting drunk.

When the second pot of kova was ready the pirate offered to refill Vernia's bowl, but she declined. He leered a little as he refilled his own, and it was not long before the second pot had gone the way of the first. Then San Thoy extracted a kerra pod from his belt pouch, and breaking it open, emptied the red contents into his toothless mouth.

For a while he mumbled the drug, expectorating thin streams of scarlet juice into the fire from time to time, and muttering drunkenly to himself as they hissed among the hot embers.

Presently he arose, and unclasping his belt, which held his tork, scarbo and knife, hung it on a peg on the wall. Then he stretched his arms and yawned hideously, the red juice trickling from the corners of his flabby mouth and staining his greasy chin.

"My dear," he said, thickly, "it is time to retire. May your humble slave assist you to disrobe?"

With this, he lurched unsteadily toward her.

Panic-stricken, Vernia jumped up, and placed the chair between herself and the advancing pirate.

* The title and position of a nobleman.

"Back!" she said. "Go back! Don't you dare touch me!"

"There, there," he said, still advancing. "Don't be frightened. San Thoy won't hurt you."

Only the chair and two feet of space separated them now. Suddenly seizing the chair he hurled it to one side and flung out both arms to grasp her. She leaped back, and his arms embraced empty air. But now she was cornered. She looked longingly at the weapons hanging on the peg, but between her and them was San Thoy.

Half crouching, arms spread, he advanced toward her. Suddenly he sprang like a beast of prey. Then like crushing bands of steel his greasy arms encircled her. His grinning, lecherous features were close to hers, leering down at her.

"Little she-marmelot!" he said. "Think you that you can resist San Thoy, who has subdued a thousand slave-girls?"

She struggled desperately, striking and clawing at the bestial face, squirming and kicking with all her strength, but to no avail.

With a laugh of exultation, he picked her up, and carrying her to the sleeping-shelf, flung her down upon it.

CHAPTER 4

A TREACHEROUS SHOAL

THE monster with which Grandon's fishing-boat had collided in the darkness was evidently not of the belligerent type, for it submerged, nearly swamping them before they attained an even keel once more.

But they were not yet out of danger, for Kantar the Gunner suddenly called to Grandon that the boat had sprung a leak as a result of the collision, and was filling rapidly.

"Then steer for the ship in the center of the squadron, and let us hope that it's the flagship," said Grandon. "I'll row and bail. It's our only chance."

With the strong strokes of Grandon assisting the sail of the swift little vessel, they were able to gain rapidly on the ship which was at the apex of the wedge-shaped squadron. As they drew near it, Kantar called:

"It is the flagship, Majesty."

"Good. Preserve absolute silence from now on," replied Grandon. "If possible, we must get aboard her without being detected."

Presently they came so close that they could hear the sounds of conversation and people moving about; yet their boat went unnoticed because the mast-lights of the flagship were so small as to cast little illumination in their direction. The beams of the powerful searchlights from the ship were directed ahead, as were those of the ships which flanked it on either side.

Thus it was that they came up under the stern of the pirate vessel without attracting attention. By this time their boat was half filled with water, despite Grandon's bailing, and likely to sink at any moment.

Depending from two pulleys high above them were the two chains by means of which the rudder was turned from the steersman's cabin in the front of the ship.

"You climb one chain," directed Grandon, "while I go up the other. We are of nearly the same weight, so if we climb at the same time each will counterbalance the other and the steersman may not notice anything amiss."

Leaping out onto the rudder, Grandon seized the chain on the side opposite them. At the same moment, Kantar grasped the chain next to the boat, and the two went up, hand over hand. Just as Kantar left the little boat, her gun-

wales went under, and before they had gotten half-way up the chains her masthead disappeared from view. They had reached the flagship just in time.

Together the two men went over the railing, each drawing his scarbo as he did so. A single watchman stood between them, but before he had time even to touch a weapon, a thrust from one side and a cut from the other, simultaneously delivered, laid him low.

Between them, they heaved the body overboard.

"Now," said Grandon, "we'll search the ship."

But scarcely had the words left his mouth ere there came a cry from the masthead, followed by a shot, as a tork bullet struck the deck between them.

"Enemies on board!" called the lookout. "Two tall strangers on the after deck. They have slain the guard."

He continued to fire his tork, but fortunately for Grandon and Kantar the light was not good, and the two men quickly found temporary refuge by dodging into an empty rear cabin.

"This is a trap," said Grandon. "We can't remain here."

"And yet," replied Kantar, "it is a good place to make a stand."

But the decision as to whether they would or would not remain was not left to them, for the door suddenly burst open, and one of the hairless, toothless yellow pirates, with scarbo in one hand and knife in the other, leaped in, yelling like a demon.

Grandon quickly silenced him with a thrust to the throat, but his place was immediately taken by two more, while others pressed in from behind, shouting:

"Kill the foreigners! Cut down the strangers!"

Grandon and Kantar were a pair difficult to best with blades of any sort, and it was not long before the floor in front of them was piled breast-high with the bodies of their foes. But suddenly an officer called an order from without, the men directly in front of them withdrew, and a small glass globe was hurled against the wall behind them.

As it shattered into tiny fragments, Grandon was conscious, for a moment, of an intensely acrid odor. Then, with senses reeling, he saw Kantar sink to the floor. A moment later, he, too, lost consciousness.

THE effects of the gas in the tiny globe were evidently but momentary, for when Grandon once more recovered his senses he was being lifted from the cabin floor by two pirates. The pile of bodies had been removed, and Kantar was being led through the cabin door by two more pirates. Both men had been disarmed, and their hands were bound behind their backs.

An officer in the uniform of a mojak ordered them brought forward and into a large cabin at the front of the ship. In this cabin another officer, whose uniform proclaimed him Romojak of the fleet, was seated at a table sipping kova.

"Whom have we here, San Thoy?" asked the Romojak, as the two prisoners were brought before him. "It appears that we have captured a royal prisoner if the taller one rightfully wears the scarlet."

"He does, Excellency," replied San Thoy, "for I recognize him from his description as Grandon of Terra, Torrogo of Reabon."

"Small wonder, then, that our warriors were mowed down like frella grass at harvest," said the Romojak, "for few men can face him, scarbo in hand, and live!" He arose and bowed to Grandon. "I am honored, Your Majesty," he said, "by your unexpected visit to my humble

ship. Now that you are here I trust that you and your warrior will remain as our guests."

"Who are you, you yellow knave?" demanded Grandon, "and what have you done with Her Majesty, the Torroga of Reabon?"

The Romojak returned his haughty look.

"I am Thid Yet, Romojak of the Fleets of Huitsen," he answered with exaggerated deference, "and Your Imperial Majesty's humble servant. As to Her Majesty, the Torroga of Reabon, I know absolutely nothing. If you seek her here you have been misinformed as to her whereabouts."

"I perceive," said Grandon, "that you are as skilled in the art of lying as in that of abduction. But mark you this. Although the Huitsenni have gone for many generations unpunished, they shall not escape this time. Whereas Huitsen is now an unsavory word, when the fleets of Reabon have done, it will be but a stinking memory, except on one condition."

"I will inquire the condition out of courtesy, although your threats do not impress me," said Thid Yet.

"That you immediately place my wife, my warrior and myself safely back on Reabonian soil."

"I can only repeat," said Thid Yet, "that I know nothing whatever of the whereabouts of Her Majesty, your wife. As for placing you and your soldier safely back upon Reabonian soil, we shall be delighted to do this for you. This, however, would entail some expense and no slight danger to us, and as you came aboard our ship unbidden we feel that it is only fair that we should be reimbursed to the slight extent of, say, a hundred thousand white slaves, young and strong, and a million keds of gold."

"What! You ask the price of an empire to set us ashore," exclaimed Kantar, "and a hundred thousand slaves besides?"

"One does not set a Torrogo of Reabon ashore every day," replied Thid Yet with his toothless grin.

"Set my wife ashore with us, unharmed, and I will pay you two million keds of gold," said Grandon, "the second million in lieu of the hundred thousand slaves, a commodity in which I do not care to traffic."

Again Thid Yet grinned.

"I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to be our guests for an indefinite period of time," he said. "Show them to the guest chambers, San Thoy."

Grandon and Kantar were hustled out of the cabin, and along the deck to a hatchway leading into the hold. Down this they were lowered like freight, and each was seized by a grinning yellow man.

"To the guest chambers," ordered San Thoy, and strolled away.

The two new guards hustled the prisoners along a dimly lighted passageway, threw them with their hands still bound behind them, into a small, evil-smelling room, and closed and bolted the door after them.

Having been flung violently into the room, Grandon's head collided with one of the stalwart ribs which braced the ship's sides, dazing him momentarily. He was brought back to full consciousness by Kantar calling to him.

"Are you hurt, Majesty?"

"A bit dazed," replied Grandon, "but I'll be all right soon. And you?"

"Only bruised a little."

"Then come over here and let me see if I can loose your bonds. We must get out some way and search the ship."

Soon the two men were seated on the damp, filthy floor, back to back, and Gran-

don was working desperately at the bonds which held Kantar's wrists. Opening the tight knots which the yellow sailors had tied would have been no easy task even with his eyes to guide him and his hands free. But he worked patiently, doggedly, until at length a knot was opened. Soon a second yielded, and Kantar, with an exclamation of relief, chafed his numbed wrists for a moment, then swiftly began the task of releasing Grandon's hands. This took less time, as the gunner could work with his hands in front of him.

When Grandon had restored the circulation to his wrists, he tried the door. It was of thick planking, and bolted so tightly that he could not budge it, but the planks, after having been fastened together, had evidently shrunk a little, as there were narrow cracks between them and on each side between door and frame. By placing an eye to one of these cracks, Grandon was able to look out into the dimly lighted hallway where a guard paced back and forth.

Kantar examined the lock, and said:

"If I only had a knife I could lift that bolt and open the door."

"Unfortunately," replied Grandon, "we have no knife, nor have we anything which will answer for one. It is possible, however, that we can get the guard to open the door."

"How?"

"By pretending that one of us is killing the other. Dead prisoners are of no use to the Huitsenni. Let us first make believe that we are quarreling. You will lie on the floor with your hands behind you as if they were still bound. First we will quarrel, then you will thump on the floor with your hands and shout that you are being kicked to death. Let us try it."

Kantar accordingly took his place on the floor, while Grandon stood where he would be behind the door when it was opened, and looked out into the hallway. As soon as the guard approached, he raised his voice and began abusing Kantar with choice patoan epithets, accusing him of having gotten him into the scrape and threatening to kill him then and there.

Kantar replied, apparently pleading for clemency, and Grandon saw the guard pause outside and listen with a broad grin on his face. But when Kantar began thumping on the floor with the palm of his hand and shouting that he was being killed, the expression on the guard's face grew serious, and he quickly opened the door.

Scarcely had he stepped inside ere Grandon sprang. Seizing him from behind with a strangle hold, he jerked him backward, shutting off his wind. At the same time Kantar stood up and quickly deprived him of his weapons.

"Close the door, Kantar, until we talk to this fellow," said Grandon.

"Now," said the Earth-man, when the gunner had complied, "we want to know where Her Majesty of Reabon is imprisoned. If you go with us quietly and show us the place, you will live. If not, you will die. Nod your head if you agree."

The guard, whose voice was completely shut off, nodded weakly, and Grandon loosened the hold on his throat, permitting him to breathe once more.

"Give me the scarbo, Kantar," said Grandon, "and retain the tork and knife for yourself. Keep a good hold on this fellow's harness, and do not hesitate to use your knife if he makes one move to betray us."

"In such an event I will use it with great pleasure, Majesty," said Kantar, grimly.

Carefully opening the door, Grandon

peered out. There was no one in the hallway.

"Where is the other guard?" he asked their captive.

"He patrols the forward corridor, Majesty," replied the guard respectfully. "It is connected with this one by two smaller corridors that branch around the central hatchway. He does not come into this corridor except at my call."

"Good. Then lead us to the Princess by the safest route. And remember, if we are discovered through fault of yours, you die."

Thus admonished, the thoroughly cowed guard led them to a ladder which descended into the corridor from the side, and with Kantar gripping his harness with one hand and his keen knife with the other, softly ascended. They came on deck near the stern and quietly made their way forward, keeping in the shadow of the cabins in order not to be observed by the lookout at the masthead.

They had covered about half the distance toward the forward cabin for which they were heading, when Grandon suddenly noticed a short, thick-set individual who had apparently just emerged from one of the cabins, carrying a bundle in his arms and hurrying toward one of the four small boats slung on this side of the craft.

After placing the bundle, which was nearly as long as himself, in the boat, the fellow, whom Grandon now recognized as San Thoy, climbed in himself and rapidly lowered the little craft to the water by means of the two ropes which passed through pulleys suspended on davits. He and his two companions flattened themselves against the cabin wall until the small boat had disappeared from view over the rail—then went forward once more.

Presently their conductor stopped before a door, and whispered:

"This is her cabin."

While Kantar watched their guide, Grandon tried the cabin door, and finding it unlocked, stepped inside. By the rays of the tiny overhead light which illuminated the little room, he could see at a glance that it was deserted. His brow clouded, and it would have gone ill with the yellow man who had led him to this cabin had he not noticed something on the floor which glinted in the light. He picked it up, and recognized it instantly as one of the jewels from Vernia's coiffure.

Stepping out of the cabin once more, he seized the guard's shoulder in a grip of iron.

"She is not here," he said, sternly, and raised his scarbo as if he were about to lay the fellow's head open.

"Spare me, Majesty," implored the yellow man. "This was her cabin. I swear it."

"Then how do you explain her absence? Speak quickly if you would live!"

"I see it all, Majesty," said the guard suddenly. "We are too late!"

"Too late? What do you mean?"

"Your Majesty saw San Thoy with the bundle—San Thoy the debauched—who spends all his earnings for beautiful slave-girls. He would dare much to possess the most beautiful woman of Zorovia."

"Then we will follow San Thoy," said Grandon, "and you will go with us. Perhaps you can give us an idea where he has gone. To the nearest boat, Kantar, and use your tork if the lookout sees us."

"He will not see us, Majesty," said the guard. "Of that I am sure, as San Thoy must have seen to it that he is either drugged or dead—probably the latter."

True to the prediction of the yellow guard, there was no alarm from the mast-

head, nor from any other part of the ship as they lowered the boat to the water and cast off. It was equipped with a small sail, which they raised as soon as the fleet was far enough away to make it improbable that it would be observed.

"Now," said Grandon, "which way do you think San Thoy sailed?"

"I can not be sure," replied the guard, "but the nearest land is the Island of the Valkars. It has a small cove, accessible in a small boat, where the Huitsenni often stop for fresh water, and where they have erected a small but strong shelter into which they may retire if surprized by a large force of the terrible inhabitants of the place. It may be that he has gone to this shelter for the night, intending to embark for some safer place tomorrow."

"Can you guide us to it?"

"I can but try, Majesty. I am no navigator like San Thoy, who can probably win safely across the shoals into the cove without even the aid of a light. But the island is a large one, and I know the general direction. If I steer properly we should reach some part of its rugged coast in a short time."

"Then," said Kantar, grimly, "see that you steer properly if you would live to see tomorrow's light."

The mast lights of the fleet were twinkling faintly in the distance as the yellow man took the tiller, and swinging it around set his course. After taking the precaution of securing his prisoner's ankle with a piece of rope, Kantar sat down a short distance ahead of him and managed to sail, while Grandon kept watch in the front of the craft.

They had not traveled far before the boom of breakers sounded ahead.

"There is the Island of the Valkars," said the prisoner, "but I know not how to find the cove. If we should try to land anywhere else we would be almost certain either to be dashed to pieces on the rugged shore or sunk by the jagged teeth of one of the many hidden reefs which circle the island. If we do land in safety, we may be set upon in the darkness by the Valkars, and carried away to be devoured."

"What are these Valkars?" asked Grandon.

"I, who have sailed every ocean of Zorovia, have never seen creatures more horrible," said the yellow man. "Endowed with human intelligence, they manufacture and use weapons and implements of metal, yet they are not human, nor even mammalian. They are amphibians. Twice we fought them off when we landed for water. I was a member of the landing-party. Although we outnumbered them each time, we lost several men in each engagement. Some were torn to pieces and devoured before our eyes. Others of our slain and wounded were carried away.

"But that was not all. After our ships had left the island following the first engagement with the Valkars, those of our men who had been stabbed, cut, bitten or scratched in the battle, though ever so slightly, began dying horrible deaths. Our mojak, who was wiser than most, had one of our Valkar prisoners slain, and according to an ancient custom, ordered every man who had received so much as a scratch to either drink a draft of its blood or eat a mouthful of its flesh. The men who complied with this order in time lived, but we did not know the reason until later.

"We took two captured Valkars to Huitsen, where they were examined by our most learned scientists. They found that these creatures secrete a venom from glands in their mouths, and before going into battle, smear their weapons and claws with it. In their blood, however, is a substance, a small quantity of which

counteracts the effect of the venom. Because they were venomous, they apparently thought we were, also, and it was evidently for that reason that some of our men were torn to pieces on the battlefield and their fragments distributed among and devoured by our enemies."

While they were talking, Grandon had been straining his eyes into the darkness before them. Suddenly he exclaimed:

"I see a light dead ahead!"

"Then I have steered better than I could have hoped," said the yellow pirate, "for it must be the light from the cabin in the cove. We will be there shortly if we can pass through the shoals unscathed."

He set his course dead ahead, asking Grandon to watch the light and direct him, as he was unable to see it from the stern on account of the sail. This Grandon did, and was greatly mystified as he watched, for although the light had seemed to be not more than a mile away when he first saw it, and they continued to sail swiftly toward it, it did not increase in brightness or apparent nearness. It seemed to have an unnatural, phosphorescent gleam, also, that would scarcely be expected to come from a cabin light.

The breakers roared louder and louder as they progressed. Suddenly their hull glanced from a submerged rock, scraped a second, and smashed, head on, into a third. There was a rending crash as the little craft swung half around, buffeted by the waves for a moment before a huge roller engulfed her.

Just beyond the treacherous shoal two men struggled desperately in the boiling, seething water, in an effort to reach the shore. But the third had gone down, never to rise again.

CHAPTER 5
THE TOAD PEOPLE

PANTING heavily from his exertions, San Thoy leaned gloatingly over Vernia, lying where he had thrown her on the sleeping-shelf. But his look of exultation suddenly turned to one of amazement when she drew back one foot and planted her heel in his solar plexus with such force that he staggered back across the little cabin, gasping for breath, until tripped by a chair and thrown to the floor.

She did not wait to see what he would do next, but sprang to her feet and dashed out of the cabin.

San Thoy was unusually agile for a man of his rotund build, so she had not taken ten steps beyond the door of the cabin before he was up and after her.

Bounding off into the darkness with no sense of direction, and no thought in mind save that of escaping the monster from whose clutches she had just broken, Vernia suddenly became conscious that many pairs of gleaming eyes, reflecting the light from the opening cabin door, were looking out at her from the surrounding darkness.

With a little scream of terror, she halted in her tracks, and San Thoy, uttering a cry of triumph, leaped forward to recapture her. But a keen barbed hook on the end of a long pole suddenly shot out from the darkness at his right, changing his triumphant shout to an agonized shriek as it sank into his shoulder. It jerked him backward, so that his feet flew from under him and he sat down with considerable violence.

At the same time a heavy body came hurtling through the air and landed on two webbed feet in front of Vernia. It was about the height of a large man and stood erect on two bowed legs with its toes turned so far outward that the two feet, with the heels together, were almost

in line. The body was thick and heavy and covered with scales in front. On the back and sides these scales were interspersed with huge bumps, which were also in evidence on the backs of the upper and lower limbs and on the head. The mouth was an enormous slit which reached nearly from ear to ear, armed with saw-like ridges of jaw-bone in lieu of teeth. The eyes were large and set in bony sockets that protruded above the cheek-bones. Like the feet, the hands were webbed and armed with sharp claws.

Thus the creature which stood before Vernia might have been nothing more than a very large and ferocious-looking toad. But the fact that it carried weapons —a pole with a hook on the end like that which had impaled San Thoy, and a mace with a curved bill which hung by a thong from its wrist, and that it wore a belt in which a large knife was thrust, made it evident that this was no common toad, but infinitely more formidable and terrible than a creature with the mind as well as the body of a toad could have been. Its use of weapons was evidence of an intelligence which was at least equal to that of the most primitive men.

Uttering a hoarse croaking cry that displayed for a moment the red interior of its cavernous maw, the creature threw a cold scaly arm around Vernia's waist and slung her over its shoulder with an ease that bespoke enormous strength. After struggling desperately for a moment, she realized the futility of attempting to pit her strength against that of the monster, and lay still.

As if it had been a signal or a call, the sound made by her captor brought a score of the creatures circling around them, all armed like the first. The beast that had captured San Thoy unhooked him without any attention to his cries of anguish, and threw him, writhing and moaning, over its warty shoulder. Then the entire group, led by Vernia's captor, marched away.

As it was pitch-dark after they left the vicinity of the lighted cabin, Vernia was unable to see where they were going. She judged, however, from the movements of her captor, that they were traversing some exceedingly rugged country. Presently this gave way to marshy lowlands, through which the toad-men leaped and splashed, then to firmer ground covered with tall, coarse grass that brushed against Vernia as she was carried through it.

When the coming of the dawn made it possible for her to see, she found herself in the midst of a city of low, moss-covered mounds. In each of these mounds a hole on the ground level, about three feet in diameter, served as a doorway, and from most of the doorways the huge inquiring eyes of the inhabitants peeped curiously out at the prisoners as they were being brought in.

Many of the other creatures which were moving about the place paused to stare at Vernia, as if they had never seen any one of her race before. San Thoy, it appeared, was of a race which they had previously seen. At least he did not attract nearly so much attention.

A shallow, sluggish stream with muddy bottom meandered through the center of the village, and seated on its banks or partly submerged in its leisurely flowing water, a number of the creatures dozed languidly.

The adult creatures on the bank and in the water, Vernia noticed, were all females — smaller than the males, and if possible, more hideous. But hopping and crawling around them, and swimming in the muddy water, were hundreds of youngsters, apparently newly hatched infants, none over eight inches tall.

Her captor chancing to walk quite near the bank with her, Vernia saw, with some

surprize, that the placidly dozing females was there for a purpose, that of hatching their young; for she saw one of the large bumps on the back of the nearest female suddenly burst open, and an infant, after tumbling out into the mud, make straight for the water and dive in. Its mother paid no attention whatever to the incident, nor did she so much as turn to look at her offspring. Several other lumps on her back had already burst open, and she was waiting for the rest to do the same.

PRESENTLY her captor left the bank of the stream, and after threading many pathways between the numerous mounds, stopped before a mound which was much larger than any of the others and appeared to be in the very heart of the city. It had a number of entrances, but her captor chose the largest, and stopping, walked through it into a large, dome-like room which was lighted by a peculiar, phosphorescent radiance that gave everything a ghastly greenish tint. This peculiar light came from immense writhing glowworms suspended on chains overhead. The air of the place was filled with a musty stench, similar to that which Vernia had noticed outside, but here so strong as to be almost overpowering.

Her captor swung her down from his warty shoulders, and set her on her feet. Then she was whirled around to face a creature much more repulsive-looking than the one that had captured her. It was squatting on the slimy cap of a gray toadstool set against the rear wall, staring at her with its goggling, gold-rimmed eyes. Its scaly hide draped its body in wrinkled folds, and there was about it a look of dried-up emaciation, as if it were very old and partly mummified.

One taloned hand held a huge mace with a curved bill. The other toyed with the hilt of a long, curved knife that hung from a massive chain girdling the monster's middle.

On either side of the fungoid throne occupied by the hideous creature was a yellow man of Huitsen, standing with folded arms in the attitude of a slave. These two pirates, captives of the toad people and evidently in attendance on the repulsive thing which seemed to be in authority, were quite filthy, and clothed in a few tattered rags which had once been garments. Both leered at the beautiful captive with their cat-like eyes, and grinned toothlessly.

After staring at her for fully five minutes, the squat monster on the toadstool rolled its gold-rimmed eyes toward the yellow man who stood at its right, and emitted a rapid succession of hoarse, booming croaks.

Much to Vernia's surprize the man replied in a human approximation of the same sounds—evidently the language of the toad people. Then he addressed Vernia: "His Majesty wishes to know your name, and whence you came," he said in patoa.

Vernia raised her eyebrows: "His Majesty! Do you refer to that croaking monster?"

"I refer to Grunk, Rogo of the Valkars. On this island his wish is law. It will be wise for you to answer his question."

"Tell him that I am Vernia, Torroga of Reabon," she directed, "and that he will be richly rewarded if I am returned, unharmed, to my people."

For several minutes the toad ruler and the yellow man carried on a croaking conversation. Then the latter addressed Vernia once more.

"His Majesty knows nothing of rewards, nor is he concerned with them," said he. "It was difficult for me to convey the idea to him in the Valkar lan-

guage, and even then it did not impress him. He is interested in you for one reason, and that is because you are the first human female his warriors have ever captured. A number of the Huitsenni, who stop at this island for fresh water, have been captured and enslaved from time to time by the toad people. As we are more skilful than they in mining and smelting metals and in the manufacture of weapons, tools, chains and ornaments, they set us at these tasks. They recognize, also, that some of us have superior cunning. I, Hui Sen, and my brother, Lui Sen, are retained for that reason as counsellors for the rogo. We try to do our work well, for as long as we prove useful we will be kept alive. But if our work displeases Grunk, we will either be killed and eaten by the Valkars or fed to Sistabez."

"And who is Sistabez?"

"The deity of the Toad People. They think him a god, though he is only a snake—an immense serpent who must be at least a thousand years old, for he has outlived many generations of Valkars. As far back as Valkar tradition goes, Sistabez has lived in his cave in the mountainside, emerging at regular intervals when hungry. At such times living sacrifices are fed to him in order to keep him from raiding the village, which he has done several times when sacrifices were not brought promptly.

"Sometimes he devours but one victim. At other times he is not satisfied with less than three or four. When he is seen emerging from his cave, guards sound the alarm, and a victim is chained to a stake in his path. A second victim is chained farther down the pathway, and a third still farther. He may devour only the first, or perhaps the first and second, but sometimes he comes on and devours the third. If he turns back to his cave then, all is well. If not, a fourth victim is chained in his pathway. Never has he been known to devour more than four victims at one meal, but wo be to the Valkars if he becomes angry, for then he will wantonly slay hundreds before returning to his lair."

Once more, Hui Sen turned and deferentially addressed Grunk in the croaking language. For some time the Rogo of the Valkars made no reply, but continued to stare at Vernia with his round, gold-rimmed eyes. Then, apparently having come to some decision, he croaked an order to the yellow slave.

"His Majesty," said Hui Sen, "has decided to retain you alive that you may serve the purpose for which females were created, and thus multiply the number of his slaves. Later, he will make some mental physical tests among the slaves, to determine who shall be your mate."

Up to this moment, Vernia had desired to live, hoping in the face of despair that she might some day be restored to Grandon. But as the significance of Hui Sen's words sank into her brain, her one desire was for speedy death. The hilt of her captor's knife projected invitingly beside her. Suddenly turning, she whipped it from the sheath and drew it back to plunge it into her bosom. But Lui Sen, standing beside the throne, while less talkative than his brother, was more observing, and the first to perceive her intention. With a cat-like spring he alighted in front of her, seized her wrist, and wrenched the knife from her grasp. Then the Rogo croaked an order, and Vernia's captor dragged her out of the hut.

She was led through the village of moss-covered mounds, toward a large mound in the midst of an extensive enclosure, surrounded by a paling of metal bars and guarded by armed Valkars. After exchanging croaks with her conductor, one of the guards opened a gate,

and she was pushed into the enclosure. Here, several hundred Huitsenni slaves were at work, forging, sharpening and polishing weapons for their batrachian masters under the supervision of armed Valkar overseers. The forges were hollowed stones in which were beds of live coals. The bellows were the lungs of huge Valkars, who blew through reed tubes which entered holes in the bottoms of the forges. The anvils were large, rounded stones, beside which the yellow workers squatted as they hammered out hooks, mace-heads and knife-blades.

THE place was a bedlam—the clanking of metal, the roar of flames, the croaks of the overseers, and the chatter of the slaves. The floor of the enclosure was littered with filth and everywhere spattered with red kerra juice. The Valkars, though they did not use the narcotic themselves, evidently believed that it made their human slaves more efficient, and kept them well supplied with the pods containing the red spores, which they mumbled from morning to night with their toothless gums, and spat unbelievable quantities of reddened saliva all about them.

Other workers were sharpening the knife-blades, hook-points and barbs, and mace bills, with rough stones, and still others were polishing them with sand. The metal parts then went to the assemblers, where the knives and maces were fitted with wooden handles and the hooks with long shafts.

Sickened by the squalor of the place, and overwhelmed with horror at thought of the fate which Grunk, Rogo of the Valkars, planned for her, Vernia shrank back against the bars of the enclosure. The yellow ex-pirates seemed fully aware of Grunk's intentions with regard to her, and raised lascivious eyes from their work to drink in her beauty, the while they bandied coarse jests, and speculated as to who would be the lucky slave to draw this prize of feminine pulchritude for whom mighty emperors had contended in vain.

Quite near her, a group of Huitsenni was assembling knives, tossing them into a central pile when finished. With one of these in her possession, she could swiftly defeat the purpose of Grunk. It was only a few steps to the pile. Would they divine her purpose?

She decided that a circuitous route would be the least likely to make them suspicious. So she set off first in the opposite direction, pausing to watch various groups of workers as if greatly interested in what they were doing. The coarse jokes of each group subsided as she drew near each in turn. They were more than a little awed by the imminence of the Torroga of Reabon. And there were a number of egotistical creatures among them who strove to impress her with attempts at dignity and gentle bearing.

Last of all, she approached the group of workers surrounding the rapidly mounting pile of knives. Casually, she picked up one of the finished weapons as if to examine it. With a swift movement, she raised it aloft, poised above her breast.

A greasy yellow hand reached over her shoulder—seized her wrist and shook the knife from her grasp. Then a coarse laugh grated in her ear.

She spun around to face the filthy and ragged Hui Sen. Evidently he had been stealthily following her for some time.

"Come," he grinned toothlessly, retaining a tight grip in her wrist. "From now on you belong to me, for I am the Rogo's choice."

Left in the clutches of the filthy and ragged Hui Sen, Vernia is quickly brought face to face with a new and undreamed-of peril, while Grandon battles savage men and fierce monsters to reach her side. Read of their breath-taking adventures in the December issue of WEIRD TALES, on sale November 1st.

"I will name you a price, then, my wolf, and in days to come you will curse the armor that broke Aild's dagger."

Worms of the Earth

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

A grim, shuddery tale of the days when Roman legions ruled in Britain—a powerful story of Bran Mak Morn, king of the Picts, and a gruesome horror from the bowels of the earth

"STRIKE in the nails, soldiers, and let our guest see the reality of our good Roman justice!"

The speaker wrapped his purple cloak closer about his powerful frame and settled back into his official chair, much as he might have settled back in his seat at the Circus Maximus to enjoy the clash of gladiatorial swords. Realization of power colored his every move. Whetted pride

was necessary to Roman satisfaction, and Titus Sulla was justly proud; for he was military governor of Ebbracum and answerable only to the emperor of Rome. He was a strongly built man of medium height, with the hawk-like features of the pure-bred Roman. Now a mocking smile curved his full lips, increasing the arrogance of his haughty aspect. Distinctly military in appearance, he wore the golden-scaled corselet and chased breastplate of his rank, with the short stabbing sword at his belt, and he held on his knee the silvered helmet with its plumed crest. Behind him stood a clump of impassive soldiers with shield and spear—blond titans from the Rhineland.

Before him was taking place the scene which apparently gave him so much real gratification—a scene common enough wherever stretched the far-flung boundaries of Rome. A rude cross lay flat upon the barren earth and on it was bound a man—half naked, wild of aspect with his corded limbs, glaring eyes and shock of tangled hair. His executioners were Roman soldiers, and with heavy hammers they prepared to pin the victim's hands and feet to the wood with iron spikes.

Only a small group of men watched this ghastly scene, in the dread place of execution beyond the city walls: the governor and his watchful guards; a few young Roman officers; the man to whom Sulla had referred as "guest" and who stood like a bronze image, unspeaking. Beside the gleaming splendor of the Roman, the quiet garb of this man seemed drab, almost somber.

He was dark, but he did not resemble the Latins around him. There was about him none of the warm, almost Oriental sensuality of the Mediterranean which colored their features. The blond barbarians behind Sulla's chair were less unlike the man in facial outline than were the Romans. Not his were the full curving red lips, nor the rich waving locks suggestive of the Greek. Nor was his dark complexion the rich olive of the south; rather it was the bleak darkness of the north. The whole aspect of the man vaguely suggested the shadowed mists, the gloom, the cold and the icy winds of the naked northern lands. Even his black eyes were savagely cold, like black fires burning through fathoms of ice.

His height was only medium but there was something about him which transcended mere physical bulk—a certain fierce innate vitality, comparable only to that of a wolf or a panther. In every line of his supple, compact body, as well as in his coarse straight hair and thin lips, this was evident—in the hawk-like set of the head on the corded neck, in the broad square shoulders, in the deep chest, the lean loins, the narrow feet. Built with the savage economy of a panther, he was an image of dynamic potentialities, pent in with iron self-control.

At his feet crouched one like him in complexion—but there the resemblance ended. This other was a stunted giant, with gnarly limbs, thick body, a low sloping brow and an expression of dull ferocity, now clearly mixed with fear. If the man on the cross resembled, in a tribal way, the man Titus Sulla called guest, he far more resembled the stunted crouching giant.

"Well, Partha Mac Othna," said the governor with studied effrontery, "when you return to your tribe, you will have a tale to tell of the justice of Rome, who rules the south."

"I will have a tale," answered the other in a voice which betrayed no emotion, just as his dark face, schooled to immobility, showed no evidence of the maelstrom in his soul.

"Justice to all under the rule of Rome,"

said Sulla. "Pax Romana! Reward for virtue, punishment for wrong!" He laughed inwardly at his own black hypocrisy, then continued: "You see, emissary of Pictland, how swiftly Rome punishes the transgressor."

"I see," answered the Pict in a voice which strongly-curbed anger made deep with menace, "that the subject of a foreign king is dealt with as though he were a Roman slave."

"He has been tried and condemned in an unbiased court," retorted Sulla.

"Aye! and the accuser was a Roman, the witnesses Roman, the judge Roman! He committed murder? In a moment of fury he struck down a Roman merchant who cheated, tricked and robbed him, and to injury added insult—aye, and a blow! Is his king but a dog, that Rome crucifies his subjects at will, condemned by Roman courts? Is his king too weak or foolish to do justice, were he informed and formal charges brought against the offender?"

"Well," said Sulla cynically, "you may inform Bran Mak Morn yourself. Rome, my friend, makes no account of her actions to barbarian kings. When savages come among us, let them act with discretion or suffer the consequences."

THE Pict shut his iron jaws with a snap that told Sulla further badgering would elicit no reply. The Roman made a gesture to the executioners. One of them seized a spike and placing it against the thick wrist of the victim, smote heavily. The iron point sank deep through the flesh, crunching against the bones. The lips of the man on the cross writhed, though no moan escaped him. As a trapped wolf fights against his cage, the bound victim instinctively wrenched and struggled. The veins swelled in his temples, sweat beaded his low forehead, the muscles in arms and legs writhed and knotted. The hammers fell in inexorable strokes, driving the cruel points deeper and deeper, through wrists and ankles; blood flowed in a black river over the hands that held the spikes, staining the wood of the cross, and the splintering of bones was distinctly heard. Yet the sufferer made no outcry, though his blackened lips writhed back until the gums were visible, and his shaggy head jerked involuntarily from side to side.

The man called Partha Mac Othna stood like an iron image, eyes burning from an inscrutable face, his whole body hard as iron from the tension of his control. At his feet crouched his misshapen servant, hiding his face from the grim sight, his arms locked about his master's knees. Those arms gripped like steel and under his breath the fellow mumbled ceaselessly as if in invocation.

The last stroke fell; the cords were cut from arm and leg, so that the man would hang supported by the nails alone. He had ceased his struggling that only twisted the spikes in his agonizing wounds. His bright black eyes, unglazed, had not left the face of the man called Partha Mac Othna; in them lingered a desperate shadow of hope. Now the soldiers lifted the cross and set the end of it in the hole prepared, stamped the dirt about it to hold it erect. The Pict hung in midair, suspended by the nails in his flesh, but still no sound escaped his lips. His eyes still hung on the somber face of the emissary, but the shadow of hope was fading.

"He'll live for days!" said Sulla cheerfully. "These Picts are harder than cats to kill! I'll keep a guard of ten soldiers watching night and day to see that no one takes him down before he dies. Ho, there, Valerius, in honor of our esteemed neighbor, King Bran Mak Morn, give him a cup of wine!"

With a laugh the young officer came forward, holding a brimming wine-cup, and rising on his toes, lifted it to the parched lips of the sufferer. In the black eyes flared a red wave of unquenchable hatred; writhing his head aside to avoid even touching the cup, he spat full into the young Roman's eyes. With a curse Valerius dashed the cup to the ground, and before any could halt him, wrenched out his sword and sheathed it in the man's body.

Sulla rose with an imperious exclamation of anger; the man called Partha Mac Othna had started violently, but he bit his lip and said nothing. Valerius seemed somewhat surprized at him, as he sullenly cleansed his sword. The act had been instinctive, following the insult to Roman pride, the one thing unbearable.

"Give up your sword, young sir!" exclaimed Sulla. "Centurion Publius, place him under arrest. A few days in a cell with stale bread and water will teach you to curb your patrician pride, in matters dealing with the will of the empire. What, you young fool, do you not realize that you could not have made the dog a more kindly gift? Who would not rather desire a quick death on the sword than the slow agony on the cross? Take him away. And you, centurion, see that guards remain at the cross so that the body is not cut down until the ravens pick bare the bones. Partha Mac Othna, I go to a banquet at the house of Demetrius—will you not accompany me?"

The emissary shook his head, his eyes fixed on the limp form which sagged on the black-stained cross. He made no reply. Sulla smiled sardonically, then rose and strode away, followed by his secretary who bore the gilded chair ceremoniously, and by the stolid soldiers, with whom walked Valerius, head sunken.

The man called Partha Mac Othna flung a wide fold of his cloak about his shoulder, halted a moment to gaze at the grim cross with its burden, darkly etched against the crimson sky, where the clouds of night were gathering. Then he stalked away, followed by his silent servant.

2

In an inner chamber of Ebbracum, the man called Partha Mac Othna paced tigerishly to and fro. His sandalled feet made no sound on the marble tiles.

"Grom!" he turned to the gnarled servant, "well I know why you held my knees so tightly—why you muttered aid of the Moon-Woman — you feared I would lose my self-control and make a mad attempt to succor that poor wretch. By the gods, I believe that was what the dog Roman wished—his iron-cased watchdogs watched me narrowly, I know, and his baiting was harder to bear than ordinarily.

"Gods black and white, dark and light!" he shook his clenched fists above his head in the black gust of his passion. "That I should stand by and see a man of mine butchered on a Roman cross — without justice and with no more trial than that farce! Black gods of R'lyeh, even you would I invoke to the ruin and destruction of those butchers! I swear by the Nameless Ones, men shall die howling for that deed, and Rome shall cry out as a woman in the dark who treads upon an adder!"

"He knew you, master," said Grom.

The other dropped his head and covered his eyes with a gesture of savage pain.

"His eyes will haunt me when I lie dying. Aye, he knew me, and almost until the last, I read in his eyes the hope that I might aid him. Gods and devils, is Rome to butcher my people beneath my very eyes? Then I am not king but dog!"

"Not so loud, in the name of all the gods!" exclaimed Grom in affright. "Did these Romans suspect you were Bran Mak Morn, they would nail you on a cross beside that other."

"They will know it ere long," grimly answered the king. "Too long I have lingered here in the guise of an emissary, spying upon mine enemies. They have thought to play with me, these Romans, masking their contempt and scorn only under polished satire. Rome is courteous to barbarian ambassadors, they give us fine houses to live in, offer us slaves, pander to our lusts with women and gold and wine and games, but all the while they laugh at us; their very courtesy is an insult, and sometimes—as today—their contempt discards all veneer. Bah! I've seen through their baitings—have remained imperturbably serene and swallowed their studied insults. But this—by the fiends of Hell, this is beyond human endurance! My people look to me; if I fail them—if I fail even one—even the lowest of my people, who will aid them? To whom shall they turn? By the gods, I'll answer the gibes of these Roman dogs with black shaft and trenchant steel!"

"And the chief with the plumes?" Grom meant the governor and his gutturals thrummed with the blood-lust. "He dies?" He flicked out a length of steel.

Bran scowled. "Easier said than done. He dies—but how may I reach him? By day his German guards keep at his back; by night they stand at door and window. He has many enemies, Romans as well as barbarians. Many a Briton would gladly slit his throat."

Grom seized Bran's garment, stammering as fierce eagerness broke the bonds of his inarticulate nature.

"Let me go, master! My life is worth nothing. I will cut him down in the midst of his warriors!"

Bran smiled fiercely and clapped his hand on the stunted giant's shoulder with a force that would have felled a lesser man.

"Nay, old war-dog, I have too much need of thee! You shall not throw your life away uselessly. Sulla would read the intent in your eyes, besides, and the javelins of his Teutons would be through you ere you could reach him. Not by the dagger in the dark will we strike this Roman, not by the venom in the cup nor the shaft from the ambush."

The king turned and paced the floor a moment, his head bent in thought. Slowly his eyes grew murky with a thought so fearful he did not speak it aloud to the waiting warrior.

"I have become somewhat familiar with the maze of Roman politics during my stay in this accursed waste of mud and marble," said he. "During a war on the Wall, Titus Sulla, as governor of this province, is supposed to hasten thither with his centuries. But this Sulla does not do; he is no coward, but the bravest avoid certain things—to each man, however bold, his own particular fear. So he sends in his place Caius Camillus, who in times of peace patrols the fens of the west, lest the Britons break over the border. And Sulla takes his place in the Tower of Trajan. Ha!"

He whirled and gripped Grom with steely fingers.

"Grom, take the red stallion and ride north! Let no grass grow under the stallion's hoofs! Ride to Cormac na Connacht and tell him to sweep the frontier with sword and torch! Let his wild Gaels feast their fill of slaughter. After a time I will be with him. But for a time I have affairs in the west."

Grom's black eyes gleamed and he

made a passionate gesture with his crooked hand—an instinctive move of savagery.

Bran drew a heavy bronze seal from beneath his tunic.

"This is my safe-conduct as an emissary to Roman courts," he said grimly. "It will open all gates between this house and Baal-dor. If any official questions you too closely—here!"

Lifting the lid of an iron-bound chest, Bran took out a small, heavy leather bag which he gave into the hands of the warrior.

"When all keys fail at a gate," said he, "try a golden key. Go now!"

There were no ceremonious farewells between the barbarian king and his barbarian vassal. Grom flung up his arm in a gesture of salute; then turning, he hurried out.

Bran stepped to a barred window and gazed out into the moonlit streets.

"Wait until the moon sets," he muttered grimly. "Then I'll take the road to —Hell! But before I go I have a debt to pay."

The stealthy clink of a hoof on the flags reached him.

"With the safe-conduct and gold, not even Rome can hold a Pictish reaver," muttered the king. "Now I'll sleep until the moon sets."

With a snarl at the marble friezework and fluted columns, as symbols of Rome, he flung himself down on a couch, from which he had long since impatiently torn the cushions and silk stuffs, as too soft for his hard body. Hate and the black passion of vengeance seethed in him, yet he went instantly to sleep. The first lesson he had learned in his bitter hard life was to snatch sleep any time he could, like a wolf that snatches sleep on the hunting trail. Generally his slumber was as light and dreamless as a panther's, but tonight it was otherwise.

He sank into fleecy gray fathoms of slumber and in a timeless, misty realm of shadows he met the tall, lean, white-bearded figure of old Gonar, the priest of the Moon, high counsellor to the king. And Bran stood aghast, for Gonar's face was white as driven snow and he shook as with ague. Well might Bran stand appalled, for in all the years of his life he had never before seen Gonar the Wise show any sign of fear.

"What now, old one?" asked the king. "Goes all well in Baal-dor?"

"All is well in Baal-dor where my body lies sleeping," answered old Gonar. "Across the void I have come to battle with you for your soul. King, are you mad, this thought you have thought in your brain?"

"Gonar," answered Bran somberly, "this day I stood still and watched a man of mine die on the cross of Rome. What his name or his rank, I do not know. I do not care. He might have been a faithful unknown warrior of mine, he might have been an outlaw. I only know that he was mine; the first scents he knew were the scents of the heather; the first light he saw was the sunrise on the Pictish hills. He belonged to me, not to Rome. If punishment was just, then none but me should have dealt it. If he were to be tried, none but me should have been his judge. The same blood flowed in our veins; the same fire maddened our brains; in infancy we listened to the same old tales, and in youth we sang the same old songs. He was bound to my heart-strings, as every man and every woman and every child of Pictland is bound. It was mine to protect him; now it is mine to avenge him."

"But in the name of the gods, Bran," expostulated the wizard, "take your

vengeance in another way! Return to the heather—mass your warriors—join with Cormac and his Gaels, and spread a sea of blood and flame the length of the great Wall!"

"All that I will do," grimly answered Bran. "But now—*now*—I will have a vengeance such as no Roman ever dreamed of! Ha, what do they know of the mysteries of this ancient isle, which sheltered strange life long before Rome rose from the marshes of the Tiber?"

"Bran, there are weapons too foul to use, even against Rome!"

Bran barked short and sharp as a jackal.

"Ha! There are no weapons I would not use against Rome! My back is at the wall. By the blood of the fiends, has Rome fought me fair? Bah! I am a barbarian king with a wolfskin mantle and an iron crown, fighting with my handful of bows and broken pikes against the queen of the world. What have I? The heather hills, the wattle huts, the spears of my shock-headed tribesmen! And I fight Rome—with her armored legions, her broad fertile plains and rich seas—her mountains and her rivers and her gleaming cities — her wealth, her steel, her gold, her mastery and her wrath. By steel and fire I will fight her—and by subtlety and treachery—by the thorn in the foot, the adder in the path, the venom in the cup, the dagger in the dark; aye," his voice sank somberly, "and by the worms of the earth!"

"But it is madness!" cried Gonar. "You will perish in the attempt you plan—you will go down to Hell and you will not return! What of your people then?"

"If I can not serve them I had better die," growled the king.

"But you can not even reach the beings you seek," cried Gonar. "For untold centuries they have dwelt *apart*. There is no door by which you can come to them. Long ago they severed the bonds that bound them to the world we know."

"Long ago," answered Bran somberly, "you told me that nothing in the universe was separated from the stream of Life—a saying the truth of which I have often seen evident. No race, no form of life but is close-knit somehow, by some manner, to the rest of Life and the world. Somewhere there is a thin link connecting *those* I seek to the world I know. Somewhere there is a Door. And somewhere among the bleak fens of the west I will find it."

Stark horror flooded Gonar's eyes and he gave back crying, "Wo! Wo! Wo! to Pictdom! Wo to the unborn kingdom! Wo, black wo to the sons of men! Wo, wo, wo, wo!"

BRAN awoke to a shadowed room and the starlight on the window-bars. The moon had sunk from sight though its glow was still faint above the house tops. Memory of his dream shook him and he swore beneath his breath.

Rising, he flung off cloak and mantle, donning a light shirt of black mesh-mail, and girding on sword and dirk. Going again to the iron-bound chest he lifted several compact bags and emptied the clinking contents into the leathern pouch at his girdle. Then wrapping his wide cloak about him, he silently left the house. No servants there were to spy on him—he had impatiently refused the offer of slaves which it was Rome's policy to furnish her barbarian emissaries. Gnarled Grom had attended to all Bran's simple needs.

The stables fronted on the courtyard. A moment's groping in the dark and he placed his hand over a great stallion's nose, checking the nicker of recognition. Working without a light he swiftly bri-

dled and saddled the great brute, and went through the courtyard into a shadowy side-street, leading him. The moon was setting, the border of floating shadows widening along the western wall. Silence lay on the marble palaces and mud hovels of Ebbracum under the cold stars.

Bran touched the pouch at his girdle, which was heavy with minted gold that bore the stamp of Rome. He had come to Ebbracum posing as an emissary of Pictdom, to act the spy. But being a barbarian, he had not been able to play his part in aloof formality and sedate dignity. He retained a crowded memory of wild feasts where wine flowed in fountains; of white-bosomed Roman women, who, sated with civilized lovers, looked with something more than favor on a virile barbarian; of gladiatorial games; and of other games where dice clicked and spun and tall stacks of gold changed hands. He had drunk deeply and gambled recklessly, after the manner of barbarians, and he had had a remarkable run of luck, due possibly to the indifference with which he won or lost. Gold to the Pict was so much dust, flowing through his fingers. In his land there was no need of it. But he had learned its power in the boundaries of civilization.

Almost under the shadow of the northwestern wall he saw ahead of him loom the great watch-tower which was connected with and reared above the outer wall. One corner of the castle-like fortress, farthest from the wall, served as a dungeon. Bran left his horse standing in a dark alley, with the reins hanging on the ground, and stole like a prowling wolf into the shadows of the fortress.

The young officer Valerius was awakened from a light, unquiet sleep by a stealthy sound at the barred window. He sat up, cursing softly under his breath as the faint starlight which etched the window-bars fell across the bare stone floor and reminded him of his disgrace. Well, in a few days, he ruminated, he'd be well out of it; Sulla would not be too harsh on a man with such high connections; then let any man or woman gibe at him! Damn that insolent Pict! But wait, he thought suddenly, remembering: what of the sound which had roused him?

"Hsssst!" it was a voice from the window.

Why so much secrecy? It could hardly be a foe—yet, why should it be a friend? Valerius rose and crossed his cell, coming close to the window. Outside all was dim in the starlight and he made out but a shadowy form close to the window.

"Who are you?" he leaned close against the bars, straining his eyes into the gloom.

His answer was a snarl of wolfish laughter, a long flicker of steel in the starlight. Valerius reeled away from the window and crashed to the floor, clutching his throat, gurgling horribly as he tried to scream. Blood gushed through his fingers, forming about his twitching body a pool that reflected the dim starlight dully and redly.

Outside Bran glided away like a shadow, without pausing to peer into the cell. In another minute the guards would round the corner on their regular routine. Even now he heard the measured tramp of their iron-clad feet. Before they came in sight he had vanished and they clumped stolidly by the cell-windows with no intimation of the corpse that lay on the floor within.

Bran rode to the small gate in the western wall, unchallenged by the sleepy watch. What fear of foreign invasion in Ebbracum?—and certain well organized thieves and women-stealers made it profitable for the watchmen not to be too vigilant. But the single guardsman at the western gate—his fellows lay drunk in a

near-by brothel — lifted his spear and bawled for Bran to halt and give an account of himself. Silently the Pict reined closer. Masked in the dark cloak, he seemed dim and indistinct to the Roman, who was only aware of the glitter of his cold eyes in the gloom. But Bran held up his hand against the starlight and the soldier caught the gleam of gold; in the other hand he saw a long sheen of steel. The soldier understood, and he did not hesitate between the choice of a golden bribe or a battle to the death with this unknown rider who was apparently a barbarian of some sort. With a grunt he lowered his spear and swung the gate open. Bran rode through, casting a handful of coins to the Roman. They fell about his feet in a golden shower, clinking against the flags. He bent in greedy haste to retrieve them and Bran Mak Morn rode westward like a flying ghost in the night.

3

INTO the dim fens of the west came Bran Mak Morn. A cold wind breathed across the gloomy waste and against the gray sky a few herons flapped heavily. The long reeds and marsh-grass waved in broken undulations and out across the desolation of the wastes a few still meres reflected the dull light. Here and there rose curiously regular hillocks above the general levels, and gaunt against the somber sky Bran saw a marching line of upright monoliths—menhirs, reared by what nameless hands?

A faint blue line to the west lay the foothills that beyond the horizon grew to the wild mountains of Wales where dwelt still wild Celtic tribes—fierce blue-eyed men that knew not the yoke of Rome. A row of well-garrisoned watch-towers held them in check. Even now, far away across the moors, Bran glimpsed the unassailable keep men called the Tower of Trajan.

These barren wastes seemed the dreary accomplishment of desolation, yet human life was not utterly lacking. Bran met the silent men of the fen, reticent, dark of eye and hair, speaking a strange mixed tongue whose long-blended elements had forgotten their pristine separate sources. Bran recognized a certain kinship in these people to himself, but he looked on them with the scorn of a pure-blooded patrician for men of mixed strains.

Not that the common people of Caledonia were altogether pure-blooded; they got their stocky bodies and massive limbs from a primitive Teutonic race which had found its way into the northern tip of the isle even before the Celtic conquest of Britain was completed, and had been absorbed by the Picts. But the chiefs of Bran's folk had kept their blood from foreign taint since the beginnings of time, and he himself was a pure-bred Pict of the Old Race. But these fenmen, overrun repeatedly by British, Gaelic and Roman conquerors, had assimilated blood of each, and in the process almost forgotten their original language and lineage.

For Bran came of a race that was very old, which had spread over western Europe in one vast Dark Empire, before the coming of the Aryans, when the ancestors of the Celts, the Hellenes and the Germans were one primal people, before the days of tribal splitting-off and westward drift.

Only in Caledonia, Bran brooded, had his people resisted the flood of Aryan conquest. He had heard of a Pictish people called Basques, who in the crags of the Pyrenees called themselves an unconquered race; but he knew that they had paid tribute for centuries to the ancestors of the Gaels, before these Celtic conquer-

ors abandoned their mountain-realm and set sail for Ireland. Only the Picts of Caledonia had remained free, and they had been scattered into small feuding tribes—he was the first acknowledged king in five hundred years—the beginning of a new dynasty—no, a revival of an ancient dynasty under a new name. In the very teeth of Rome he dreamed his dreams of empire.

He wandered through the fens, seeking a Door. Of his quest he said nothing to the dark-eyed fenmen. They told him news that drifted from mouth to mouth—a tale of war in the north, the skirl of war-pipes along the winding Wall, of gathering-fires in the heather, of flame and smoke and rapine and the glutting of Gaelic swords in the crimson sea of slaughter. The eagles of the legions were moving northward and the ancient road resounded to the measured tramp of the iron-clad feet. And Bran, in the fens of the west, laughed, well pleased.

In Ebbracum Titus Sulla gave secret word to seek out the Pictish emissary with the Gaelic name who had been under suspicion, and who had vanished the night young Valerius was found dead in his cell with his throat ripped out. Sulla felt that this sudden bursting flame of war on the Wall was connected closely with his execution of a condemned Pictish criminal, and he set his spy system to work, though he felt sure that Partha Mac Othna was by this time far beyond his reach. He prepared to march from Ebbracum, but he did not accompany the considerable force of legionaries which he sent north. Sulla was a brave man, but each man has his own dread, and Sulla's was Cormac na Connacht, the black-haired prince of the Gaels, who had sworn to cut out the governor's heart and eat it raw. So Sulla rode with his ever-present bodyguard, westward, where lay the Tower of Trajan with its war-like commander, Caius Camillus, who enjoyed nothing more than taking his superior's place when the red waves of war washed at the foot of the Wall. Devious politics, but the legate of Rome seldom visited this far isle, and what of his wealth and intrigues, Titus Sulla was the highest power in Britain.

And Bran, knowing all this, patiently waited his coming, in the deserted hut in which he had taken up his abode.

One gray evening he strode on foot across the moors, a stark figure, blackly etched against the dim crimson fire of the sunset. He felt the incredible antiquity of the slumbering land, as he walked like the last man on the day after the end of the world. Yet at last he saw a token of human life—a drab hut of wattle and mud, set in the reedy breast of the fen.

A WOMAN greeted him from the open door and Bran's somber eyes narrowed with a dark suspicion. The woman was not old, yet the evil wisdom of ages was in her eyes; her garments were ragged and scanty, her black locks tangled and unkempt, lending her an aspect of wildness well in keeping with her grim surroundings. Her red lips laughed but there was no mirth in her laughter, only a hint of mockery, and under the lips her teeth showed sharp and pointed like fangs.

"Enter, master," said she, "if you do not fear to share the roof of the witch-woman of Dagon-moor!"

Bran entered silently and sat him down on a broken bench while the woman busied herself with the scanty meal cooking over an open fire on the squalid hearth. He studied her lithe, almost serpentine motions, the ears which were almost pointed, the yellow eyes which slanted curiously.

"What do you seek in the fens, my

lord?" she asked, turning toward him with a supple twist of her whole body.

"I seek a Door," he answered, chin resting on his fist. "I have a song to sing to the worms of the earth!"

She started upright, a jar falling from her hands to shatter on the hearth.

"This is an ill saying, even spoken in chance," she stammered.

"I speak not by chance but by intent," he answered.

She shook her head. "I know not what you mean."

"Well you know," he returned. "Aye, you know well! My race is very old—they reigned in Britain before the nations of the Celts and the Hellenes were born out of the womb of peoples. But my people were not first in Britain. By the mottles on your skin, by the slanting of your eyes, by the taint in your veins, I speak with full knowledge and meaning."

Awhile she stood silent, her lips smiling but her face inscrutable.

"Man, are you mad?" she asked, "that in your madness you come seeking that from which strong men fled screaming in old times?"

"I seek a vengeance," he answered, "that can be accomplished only by Them I seek."

She shook her head.

"You have listened to a bird singing; you have dreamed empty dreams."

"I have heard a viper hiss," he growled, "and I do not dream. Enough of this weaving of words. I came seeking a link between two worlds; I have found it."

"I need lie to you no more, man of the North," answered the woman. "They you seek still dwell beneath the sleeping hills. They have drawn *apart,* farther and farther from the world you know."

"But they still steal forth in the night to grip women straying on the moors," said he, his gaze on her slanted eyes. She laughed wickedly.

"What would you of me?"

"That you bring me to Them."

She flung back her head with a scornful laugh. His left hand locked like iron in the breast of her scanty garment and his right closed on his hilt. She laughed in his face.

"Strike and be damned, my northern wolf! Do you think that such life as mine is so sweet that I would cling to it as a babe to the breast?"

His hand fell away.

"You are right. Threats are foolish. I will buy your aid."

"How?" the laugh voice hummed with mockery.

Bran opened his pouch and poured into his cupped palm a stream of gold.

"More wealth than the men of the fen ever dreamed of."

Again she laughed. "What is this rusty metal to me? Save it for some white-breasted Roman woman who will play the traitor for you!"

"Name me a price!" he urged. "The head of an enemy——"

"By the blood in my veins, with its heritage of ancient hate, who is mine enemy but thee?" she laughed and springing, struck cat-like. But her dagger splintered on the mail beneath her cloak and he flung her off with a loathsome flirt of his wrist which tossed her sprawling across her grass-strewn bunk. Lying there she laughed up at him.

"I will name you a price, then, my wolf, and it may be in days to come you will curse the armor that broke Atla s dagger!" She rose and came close to him, her disquietingly long hands fastened fiercely into his cloak. "I will tell you, Black Bran, king of Caledon! Oh, I knew you when you came into my hut with your black hair and your cold eyes!

I will lead you to the doors of Hell if you wish—and the price shall be the kisses of a king!

"What of my blasted and bitter life, I, whom mortal men loathe and fear? I have not known the love of men, the clasp of a strong arm, the sting of human kisses, I, Atla, the were-woman of the moors! What have I known but the lone winds of the fens, the dreary fire of cold sunsets, the whispering of the marsh grasses?—the faces that blink up at me in the waters of the meres, the foot-pad of night—things in the gloom, the glimmer of red eyes, the grisly murmur of nameless beings in the night!

"I am half-human, at least! Have I not known sorrow and yearning and crying wistfulness, and the drear ache of loneliness? Give to me, king—give me your fierce kisses and your hurtful barbarian's embrace. Then in the long drear years to come I shall not utterly eat out my heart in vain envy of the white-bosomed women of men; for I shall have a memory few of them can boast—the kisses of a king! One night of love, oh king, and I will guide you to the gates of Hell!"

Bran eyed her somberly; he reached forth and gripped her arm in his iron fingers. An involuntary shudder shook him at the feel of her sleek skin. He nodded slowly and drawing her close to him, forced his head down to meet her lifted lips.

4

THE cold gray mists of dawn wrapped King Bran like a clammy cloak. He turned to the woman whose slanted eyes gleamed in the gray gloom.

"Make good your part of the contract," he said roughly. "I sought a link between worlds, and in you I found it. I seek the one thing sacred to Them. It shall be the Key opening the Door that lies unseen between me and Them. Tell me how I can reach it."

"I will," the red lips smiled terribly. "Go to the mound men call Dagon's Barrow. Draw aside the stone that blocks the entrance and go under the dome of the mound. The floor of the chamber is made of seven great stones, six grouped about the seventh. Lift out the center stone—and you will see!"

"Will I find the Black Stone?" he asked.

"Dagon's Barrow is the Door to the Black Stone," she answered, "if you dare follow the Road."

"Will the symbol be well guarded?" He unconsciously loosened his blade in its sheath. The red lips curled mockingly.

"If you meet any on the Road you will die as no mortal man has died for long centuries. The Stone is not guarded, as men guard their treasures. Why should They guard what man has never sought? Perhaps They will be near, perhaps not. It is a chance you must take, if you wish the Stone. Beware, king of Pictdom! Remember it was your folk who, so long ago, cut the thread that bound Them to human life. They were almost human then—they overspread the land and knew the sunlight. Now they have drawn *apart*. They know not the sunlight and they shun the light of the moon. Even the starlight they hate. Far, far apart have they drawn, who might have been men in time, but for the spears of your ancestors."

THE sky was overcast with misty gray, through which the sun shone coldly yellow when Bran came to Dagon's Barrow, a round hillock overgrown with rank grass of a curious fungoid appearance. On the eastern side of the mound

showed the entrance of a crudely built stone tunnel which evidently penetrated the barrow. One great stone blocked the entrance to the tomb. Bran laid hold of the sharp edges and exerted all his strength. It held fast. He drew his sword and worked the blade between the blocking stone and the sill. Using the sword as a lever, he worked carefully, and managed to loosen the great stone and wrench it out. A foul charnel-house scent flowed out of the aperture and the dim sunlight seemed less to illuminate the cavern-like opening than to be fouled by the rank darkness which clung there.

Sword in hand, ready for he knew not what, Bran groped his way into the tunnel, which was long and narrow, built up of heavy joined stones, and was too low for him to stand erect. Either his eyes became somewhat accustomed to the gloom, or the darkness was, after all, somewhat lightened by the sunlight filtering in through the entrance. At any rate he came into a round low chamber and was able to make out its general dome-like outline. Here, no doubt, in old times, had reposed the bones of him for whom the stones of the tomb had been joined and the earth heaped high above them; but now of those bones no vestige remained on the stone floor. And bending close and straining his eyes, Bran made out the strange, startlingly regular pattern of that floor: six well-cut slabs clustered about a seventh, six-sided stone.

He drove his sword-point into a crack and pried carefully. The edge of the central stone tilted slightly upward. A little work and he lifted it out and leaned it against the curving wall. Straining his eyes downward he saw only the gaping blackness of a dark well, with small, worn steps that led downward and out of sight. He did not hesitate. Though the skin between his shoulders crawled curiously, he swung himself into the abyss and felt the clinging blackness swallow him.

Groping downward, he felt his feet slip and stumble on steps too small for human feet. With one hand pressed hard against the side of the well he steadied himself, fearing a fall into unknown and unlighted depths. The steps were cut into solid rock, yet they were greatly worn away. The farther he progressed, the less like steps they became, mere bumps of worn stone. Then the direction of the shaft changed sharply. It still led down, but at a shallow slant down which he could walk, elbows braced against the hollowed sides, head bent low beneath the curved roof. The steps had ceased altogether and the stone felt slimy to the touch, like a serpent's lair. What beings, Bran wondered, had slithered up and down this slanting shaft, for how many centuries?

The tunnel narrowed until Bran found it rather difficult to shove through. He lay on his back and pushed himself along with his hands, feet first. Still he knew he was sinking deeper and deeper into the very guts of the earth; how far below the surface he was, he dared not contemplate. Then ahead a faint witch-fire gleam tinged the abysmal blackness. He grinned savagely and without mirth. If They he sought came suddenly upon him, how could he fight in that narrow shaft? But he had put the thought of personal fear behind him when he began this hellish quest. He crawled on, thoughtless of all else but his goal.

And he came at last into a vast space where he could stand upright. He could not see the roof of the place, but he got an impression of dizzying vastness. The blackness pressed in on all sides and behind him he could see the entrance to the shaft from which he had just emerged—a black well in the darkness. But in front

of him a strange grisly radiance glowed about a grim altar built of human skulls. The source of that light he could not determine, but on the altar lay a sullen night-black object—the Black Stone!

Bran wasted no time in giving thanks that the guardians of the grim relic were nowhere near. He caught up the Stone, and gripping it under his left arm, crawled into the shaft. When a man turns his back on peril its clammy menace looms more grisly than when he advances upon it. So Bran, crawling back up the nighted shaft with his grisly prize, felt the darkness turn on him and slink behind him, grinning with dripping fangs. Clammy sweat beaded his flesh and he hastened to the best of his ability, ears strained for some stealthy sound to betray that fell shapes were at his heels. Strong shudders shook him, despite himself, and the short hair on his neck prickled as if a cold wind blew at his back.

When he reached the first of the tiny steps he felt as if he had attained to the outer boundaries of the mortal world. Up them he went, stumbling and slipping, and with a deep gasp of relief, came out into the tomb, whose spectral grayness seemed like the blaze of noon in comparison to the stygian depths he had just traversed. He replaced the central stone and strode into the light of the outer day, and never was the cold yellow light of the sun more grateful, as it dispelled the shadows of black-winged nightmares of fear and madness that seemed to have ridden him up out of the black deeps. He shoved the great blocking stone back into place, and picking up the cloak he had left at the mouth of the tomb, he wrapped it about the Black Stone and hurried away, a strong revulsion and loathing shaking his soul and lending wings to his strides.

A gray silence brooded over the land. It was desolate as the blind side of the moon, yet Bran felt the potentialities of life—under his feet, in the brown earth—sleeping, but how soon to waken, and in what horrific fashion?

He came through the tall masking reeds to the still deep men called Dagon's Mere. No slightest ripple ruffled the cold blue water to give evidence of the grisly monster legend said dwelt beneath. Bran closely scanned the breathless landscape. He saw no hint of life, human or unhuman. He sought the instincts of his savage soul to know if any unseen eyes fixed their lethal gaze upon him, and found no response. He was alone as if he were the last man alive on earth.

Swiftly he unwrapped the Black Stone, and as it lay in his hands like a solid sullen block of darkness, he did not seek to learn the secret of its material nor scan the cryptic characters carved thereon. Weighing it in his hands and calculating the distance, he flung it far out, so that it fell almost exactly in the middle of the lake. A sullen splash and the waters closed over it. There was a moment of shimmering flashes on the bosom of the lake; then the blue surface stretched placid and unrippled again.

5

THE were-woman turned swiftly as Bran approached her door. Her slant eyes widened.

"You! And alive! And sane!"

"I have been into Hell and I have returned," he growled. "What is more, I have that which I sought."

"The Black Stone?" she cried. "You really dared steal it? Where is it?"

"No matter; but last night my stallion screamed in his stall and I heard something crunch beneath his thundering hoofs which was not the wall of the stable—and there was blood on his hoofs when I came to see, and blood on the

floor of the stall. And I have heard stealthy sounds in the night, and noises beneath my dirt floor, as if worms burrowed deep in the earth. They know I have stolen their Stone. Have you betrayed me?"

She shook her head.

"I keep your secret; they do not need my word to know you. The farther they have retreated from the world of men, the greater have grown their powers in other uncanny ways. Some dawn your hut will stand empty and if men dare investigate they will find nothing—except crumbling bits of earth on the dirt floor."

Bran smiled terribly.

"I have not planned and toiled thus far to fall prey to the talons of vermin. If They strike me down in the night, They will never know what became of their idol—or whatever it be to Them. I would speak with Them."

"Dare you come with me and meet them in the night?" she asked.

"Thunder of all gods!" he snarled. "Who are you to ask me if I dare? Lead me to Them and let me bargain for a vengeance this night. The hour of retribution draws nigh. This day I saw silvered helmets and bright shields gleam across the fens — the new commander has arrived at the Tower of Trajan and Caius Camillus has marched to the Wall."

THAT night the king went across the dark desolation of the moors with the silent were-woman. The night was thick and still as if the land lay in ancient slumber. The stars blinked vaguely, mere points of red struggling through the unbreathing gloom. Their gleam was dimmer than the glitter in the eyes of the woman who glided beside the king. Strange thoughts shook Bran, vague, titanic, primeval. Tonight ancestral linkings with these slumbering fens stirred in his soul and troubled him with the fantasmal, eon-veiled shapes of monstrous dreams. The vast age of his race was borne upon him; where now he walked an outlaw and an alien, dark-eyed kings in whose mold he was cast, had reigned in old times. The Celtic and Roman invaders were as strangers to this ancient isle beside his people. Yet his race likewise had been invaders, and there was an older race than his—a race whose beginnings lay lost and hidden back beyond the dark oblivion of antiquity.

Ahead of them loomed a low range of hills, which formed the easternmost extremity of those straying chains which far away climbed at last to the mountains of Wales. The woman led the way up what might have been a sheep-path, and halted before a wide black gaping cave.

"A door to those you seek, oh king!" her laughter rang hateful in the gloom. "Dare ye enter?"

His fingers closed in her tangled locks and he shook her viciously.

"Ask me but once more if I dare," he grated, "and your head and shoulders part company! Lead on."

Her laughter was like sweet deadly venom. They passed into the cave and Bran struck flint and steel. The flicker of the tinder showed him a wide dusty cavern, on the roof of which hung clusters of bats. Lighting a torch, he lifted it and scanned the shadowy recesses, seeing nothing but dust and emptiness.

"Where are They?" he growled.

She beckoned him to the back of the cave and leaned against the rough wall, as if casually. But the king's keen eyes caught the motion of her hand pressing hard against a projecting ledge. He recoiled as a round black well gaped suddenly at his feet. Again her laughter slashed him like a keen silver knife. He held the torch to the opening and again saw small worn steps leading down.

"They do not need those steps," said Atla. "Once they did, before your people drove them into the darkness. But you will need them."

She thrust the torch into a niche above the well; it shed a faint red light into the darkness below. She gestured into the well and Bran loosened his sword and stepped into the shaft. As he went down into the mystery of the darkness, the light was blotted out above him, and he thought for an instant Atla had covered the opening again. Then he realized that she was descending after him.

THE descent was not a long one. Abruptly Bran felt his feet on a solid floor. Atla swung down beside him and stood in the dim circle of light that drifted down the shaft. Bran could not see the limits of the place into which he had come.

"Many caves in these hills," said Atla, her voice sounding small and strangely brittle in the vastness, "are but doors to greater caves which lie beneath, even as a man's words and deeds are but small indications of the dark caverns of murky thought lying behind and beneath."

And now Bran was aware of movement in the gloom. The darkness was filled with stealthy noises not like those made by any human foot. Abruptly sparks began to flash and float in the blackness, like flickering fireflies. Closer they came until they girdled him in a wide half-moon. And beyond the ring gleamed other sparks, a solid sea of them, fading away in the gloom until the farthest were mere tiny pin-points of light. And Bran knew they were the slanted eyes of the beings who had come upon him in such numbers that his brain reeled at the contemplation—and at the vastness of the cavern.

Now that he faced his ancient foes, Bran knew no fear. He felt the waves of terrible menace emanating from them, the grisly hate, the inhuman threat to body, mind and soul. More than a member of a less ancient race, he realized the horror of his position, but he did not fear, though he confronted the ultimate Horror of the dreams and legends of his race. His blood raced fiercely but it was with the hot excitement of the hazard, not the drive of terror.

"They know you have the Stone, oh king," said Atla, and though he knew she feared, though he felt her physical efforts to control her trembling limbs, there was no quiver of fright in her voice. "You are in deadly peril; they know your breed of old — oh, they remember the days when their ancestors were men! I can not save you; both of us will die as no human has died for ten centuries. Speak to them, if you will; they can understand your speech, though you may not understand theirs. But it will avail not—you are human—and a Pict."

Bran laughed and the closing ring of fire shrank back at the savagery in his laughter. Drawing his sword with a soul-chilling rasp of steel, he set his back against what he hoped was a solid stone wall. Facing the glittering eyes with his sword gripped in his right hand and his dirk in his left, he laughed as a blood-hungry wolf snarls.

"Aye," he growled, "I am a Pict, a son of those warriors who drove your brutish ancestors before them like chaff before the storm!—who flooded the land with your blood and heaped high your skulls for a sacrifice to the Moon-Woman! You who fled of old before my race, dare ye now snarl at your master? Roll on me like a flood, now, if ye dare! Before your viper fangs drink my life I will reap your multitudes like ripened barley—of your severed heads will I build a tower and of your mangled corpses will I rear up a

wall! Dogs of the dark, vermin of Hell, worms of the earth, rush in and try my steel! When Death finds me in this dark cavern, your living will howl for the scores of your dead and your Black Stone will be lost to you for ever—for only I know where it is hidden and not all the tortures of all the Hells can wring the secret from my lips!"

Then followed a tense silence; Bran faced the fire-lit darkness, tensed like a wolf at bay, waiting the charge; at his side the woman cowered, her eyes ablaze. Then from the silent ring that hovered beyond the dim torchlight rose a vague abhorrent murmur. Bran, prepared as he was for anything, started. Gods, was *that* the speech of creatures which had once been called men?

Atla straightened, listening intently. From her lips came the same hideous soft sibilances, and Bran, though he had already known the grisly secret of her being, knew that never again could he touch her save with soul-shaken loathing.

She turned to him, a strange smile curving her red lips dimly in the ghostly light.

"They fear you, oh king! By the black secrets of R'lyeh, who are you that Hell itself quails before you? Not your steel, but the stark ferocity of your soul has driven unused fear into their strange minds. They will buy back the Black Stone at any price."

"Good," Bran sheathed his weapons. "They shall promise not to molest you because of your aid of me. And," his voice hummed like the purr of a hunting tiger, "They shall deliver into my hands Titus Sulla, governor of Ebbracum, now commanding the Tower of Trajan. This They can do—how, I know not. But I know that in the old days, when my people warred with these Children of the Night, babes disappeared from guarded huts and none saw the stealers come or go. Do They understand?"

Again rose the low frightful sounds and Bran, who feared not their wrath, shuddered at their voices.

"They understand," said Atla. "Bring the Black Stone to Dagon's Ring tomorrow night when the earth is veiled with the blackness that foreruns the dawn. Lay the Stone on the altar. There They will bring Titus Sulla to you. Trust Them; They have not interfered in human affairs for many centuries, but They will keep their word."

Bran nodded and turning, climbed up the stair with Atla close behind him. At the top he turned and looked down once more. As far as he could see floated a glittering ocean of slanted yellow eyes upturned. But the owners of those eyes kept carefully beyond the dim circle of torchlight and of their bodies he could see nothing. Their low hissing speech floated up to him and he shuddered as his imagination visualized, not a throng of biped creatures, but a swarming, swaying myriad of serpents, gazing up at him with their glittering unwinking eyes.

He swung into the upper cave and Atla thrust the blocking stone back in place. It fitted into the entrance of the well with uncanny precision; Bran was unable to discern any crack in the apparently solid floor of the cavern. Atla made a motion to extinguish the torch, but the king stayed her.

"Keep it so until we are out of the cave," he grunted. "We might tread on an adder in the dark."

Atla's sweetly hateful laughter rose maddeningly in the flickering gloom.

6

It was not long before sunset when Bran came again to the reed-grown marge of Dagon's Mere. Casting cloak

and sword-belt on the ground, he stripped himself of his short leathern breeches. Then gripping his naked dirk in his teeth, he went into the water with the smooth ease of a diving seal. Swimming strongly, he gained the center of the small lake, and turning, drove himself downward.

The mere was deeper than he had thought. It seemed he would never reach the bottom, and when he did, his groping hands failed to find what he sought. A roaring in his ears warned him and he swam to the surface.

Gulping deep of the refreshing air, he dived again, and again his quest was fruitless. A third time he sought the depth, and this time his groping hands met a familiar object in the silt of the bottom. Grasping it, he swam up to the surface.

The Stone was not particularly bulky, but it was heavy. He swam leisurely, and suddenly was aware of a curious stir in the waters about him which was not caused by his own exertions. Thrusting his face below the surface, he tried to pierce the blue depths with his eyes and thought to see a dim gigantic shadow hovering there.

He swam faster, not frightened, but wary. His feet struck the shallows and he waded up on the shelving shore. Looking back he saw the waters swirl and subside. He shook his head, swearing. He had discounted the ancient legend which made Dagon's Mere the lair of a nameless water-monster, but now he had a feeling as if his escape had been narrow. The time-worn myths of the ancient land were taking form and coming to life before his eyes. What primeval shape lurked below the surface of that treacherous mere, Bran could not guess, but he felt that the fenmen had good reason for shunning the spot, after all.

Bran donned his garments, mounted the black stallion and rode across the fens in the desolate crimson of the sunset's afterglow, with the Black Stone wrapped in his cloak. He rode, not to his hut, but to the west, in the direction of the Tower of Trajan and the Ring of Dagon. As he covered the miles that lay between, the red stars winked out. Midnight passed him in the moonless night and still Bran rode on. His heart was hot for his meeting with Titus Sulla. Atla had gloated over the anticipation of watching the Roman writhe under torture, but no such thought was in the Pict's mind. The governor should have his chance with weapons—with Bran's own sword he should face the Pictish king's dirk, and live or die according to his prowess. And though Sulla was famed throughout the provinces as a swordsman, Bran felt no doubt as to the outcome.

Dagon's Ring lay some distance from the Tower—a sullen circle of tall gaunt stones planted upright, with a rough-hewn stone altar in the center. The Romans looked on these menhirs with aversion; they thought the Druids had reared them; but the Celts supposed Bran's people, the Picts, had planted them—and Bran well knew what hands reared those grim monoliths in lost ages, though for what reasons, he but dimly guessed.

The king did not ride straight to the Ring. He was consumed with curiosity as to how his grim allies intended carrying out their promise. That They could snatch Titus Sulla from the very midst of his men, he felt sure, and he believed he knew how They would do it. He felt the gnawings of a strange misgiving, as if he had tampered with powers of unknown breadth and depth, and had loosed forces which he could not control. Each time he remembered that reptilian murmur, those slanted eyes of the night before, a cold breath passed over him. They had

been abhorrent enough when his people drove Them into the caverns under the hills, ages ago; what had long centuries of retrogression made of them? In their nighted, subterranean life, had They retained any of the attributes of humanity at all?

Some instinct prompted him to ride toward the Tower. He knew he was near; but for the thick darkness he could have plainly seen its stark outline tusking the horizon. Even now he should be able to make it out dimly. An obscure, shuddersome premonition shook him and he spurred the stallion into swift canter.

And suddenly Bran staggered in his saddle as from a physical impact, so stunning was the surprize of what met his gaze. The impregnable Tower of Trajan was no more! Bran's astounded gaze rested on a gigantic pile of ruins—of shattered stone and crumbled granite, from which jutted the jagged and splintered ends of broken beams. At one corner of the tumbled heap one tower rose out of the waste of crumpled masonry, and it leaned drunkenly as if its foundations had been half cut away.

BRAN dismounted and walked forward, dazed by bewilderment. The moat was filled in places by fallen stones and broken pieces of mortared wall. He crossed over and came among the ruins. Where, he knew, only a few hours before the flags had resounded to the martial tramp of iron-clad feet, and the walls had echoed to the clang of shields and the blast of the loud-throated trumpets, a horrific silence reigned.

Almost under Bran's feet, a broken shape writhed and groaned. The king bent down to the legionary who lay in a sticky red pool of his own blood. A single glance showed the Pict that the man, horribly crushed and shattered, was dying.

Lifting the bloody head, Bran placed his flask to the pulped lips and the Roman instinctively drank deep, gulping through splintered teeth. In the dim starlight Bran saw his glazed eyes roll.

"The walls fell," muttered the dying man. "They crashed down like the skies falling on the day of doom. Ah Jove, the skies rained shards of granite and hailstones of marble!"

"I have felt no earthquake shock," Bran scowled, puzzled.

"It was no earthquake," muttered the Roman. "Before last dawn it began, the faint dim scratching and clawing far below the earth. We of the guard heard it—like rats burrowing, or like worms hollowing out the earth. Titus laughed at us, but all day long we heard it. Then at midnight the Tower quivered and seemed to settle—as if the foundations were being dug away——"

A shudder shook Bran Mak Morn. The worms of the earth! Thousands of vermin digging like moles far below the castle, burrowing away the foundations—gods, the land must be honeycombed with tunnels and caverns—these creatures were even less human than he had thought—what ghastly shapes of darkness had he invoked to his aid?

"What of Titus Sulla?" he asked, again holding the flask to the legionary's lips; in that moment the dying Roman seemed to him almost like a brother.

"Even as the Tower shuddered we heard a fearful scream from the governor's chamber," muttered the soldier. "We rushed there—as we broke down the door we heard his shrieks—they seemed to recede—*into the bowels of the earth!* We rushed in; the chamber was empty. His blood-stained sword lay on the floor; in the stone flags of the floor a black hole

gaped. Then—the—towers—reeled—the—roof—broke;—through—a—storm—of—crashing—walls—I—crawled——"

A strong convulsion shook the broken figure.

"Lay me down, friend," whispered the Roman. "I die."

He had ceased to breathe before Bran could comply. The Pict rose, mechanically cleansing his hands. He hastened from the spot, and as he galloped over the darkened fens, the weight of the accursed Black Stone under his cloak was as the weight of a foul nightmare on a mortal breast.

As he approached the Ring, he saw an eery glow within, so that the gaunt stones stood etched like the ribs of a skeleton in which a witch-fire burns. The stallion snorted and reared as Bran tied him to one of the menhirs. Carrying the Stone he strode into the grisly circle and saw Atla standing beside the altar, one hand on her hip, her sinuous body swaying in a serpentine manner. The altar glowed all over with ghastly light and Bran knew some one, probably Atla, had rubbed it with phosphorus from some dank swamp or quagmire.

He strode forward and whipping his cloak from about the Stone, flung the accursed thing on to the altar.

"I have fulfilled my part of the contract," he growled.

"And They, theirs," she retorted. "Look!—they come!"

He wheeled, his hand instinctively dropping to his sword. Outside the Ring the great stallion screamed savagely and reared against his tether. The night wind moaned through the waving grass and an abhorrent soft hissing mingled with it. Between the menhirs flowed a dark tide of shadows, unstable and chaotic. The Ring filled with glittering eyes which hovered beyond the dim illusive circle of illumination cast by the phosphorescent altar. Somewhere in the darkness a human voice tittered and gibbered idiotically. Bran stiffened, the shadows of a horror clawing at his soul.

He strained his eyes, trying to make out the shapes of those who ringed him. But he glimpsed only billowing masses of shadow which heaved and writhed and squirmed with almost fluid consistency.

"Let them make good their bargain!" he exclaimed angrily.

"Then see, oh king!" cried Atla in a voice of piercing mockery.

THERE was a stir, a seething in the writhing shadows, and from the darkness crept, like a four-legged animal, a human shape that fell down and groveled at Bran's feet and writhed and mowed, and lifting a death's-head, howled like a dying dog. In the ghastly light, Bran, soul-shaken, saw the blank glassy eyes, the bloodless features, the loose, writhing, froth-covered lips of sheer lunacy—gods, was this Titus Sulla, the proud lord of life and death in Ebbracum's proud city?

Bran bared his sword.

"I had thought to give this stroke in vengeance," he said somberly. "I give it in mercy—*Vale Cæsar!*"

The steel flashed in the eery light and Sulla's head rolled to the foot of the glowing altar, where it lay staring up at the shadowed sky.

"They harmed him not!" Atla's hateful laugh slashed the sick silence. "It was what he saw and came to know that broke his brain! Like all his heavy-footed race, he knew nothing of the secrets of this ancient land. This night he has been dragged through the deepest pits of Hell, where even you might have blenched!"

"Well for the Romans that they know not the secrets of this accursed land!"

Bran roared, maddened, "with its monster-haunted meres, its foul witch-women, and its lost caverns and subterranean realms where spawn in the darkness shapes of Hell!"

"Are they more foul than a mortal who seeks their aid?" cried Atla with a shriek of fearful mirth. "Give them their Black Stone!"

A cataclysmic loathing shook Bran's soul with red fury.

"Aye, take your cursed Stone!" he roared, snatching it from the altar and dashing it among the shadows with such savagery that bones snapped under its impact. A hurried babel of grisly tongues rose and the shadows heaved in turmoil. One segment of the mass detached itself for an instant and Bran cried out in fierce revulsion, though he caught only a fleeting glimpse of the thing, had only a brief impression of a broad strangely flattened head, pendulous writhing lips that bared curved pointed fangs, and a hideously misshapen, dwarfish body that seemed *mottled*—all set off by those unwinking reptilian eyes. Gods!—the myths had prepared him for horror in human aspect, horror induced by bestial visage and stunted deformity—but this was the horror of nightmare and the night.

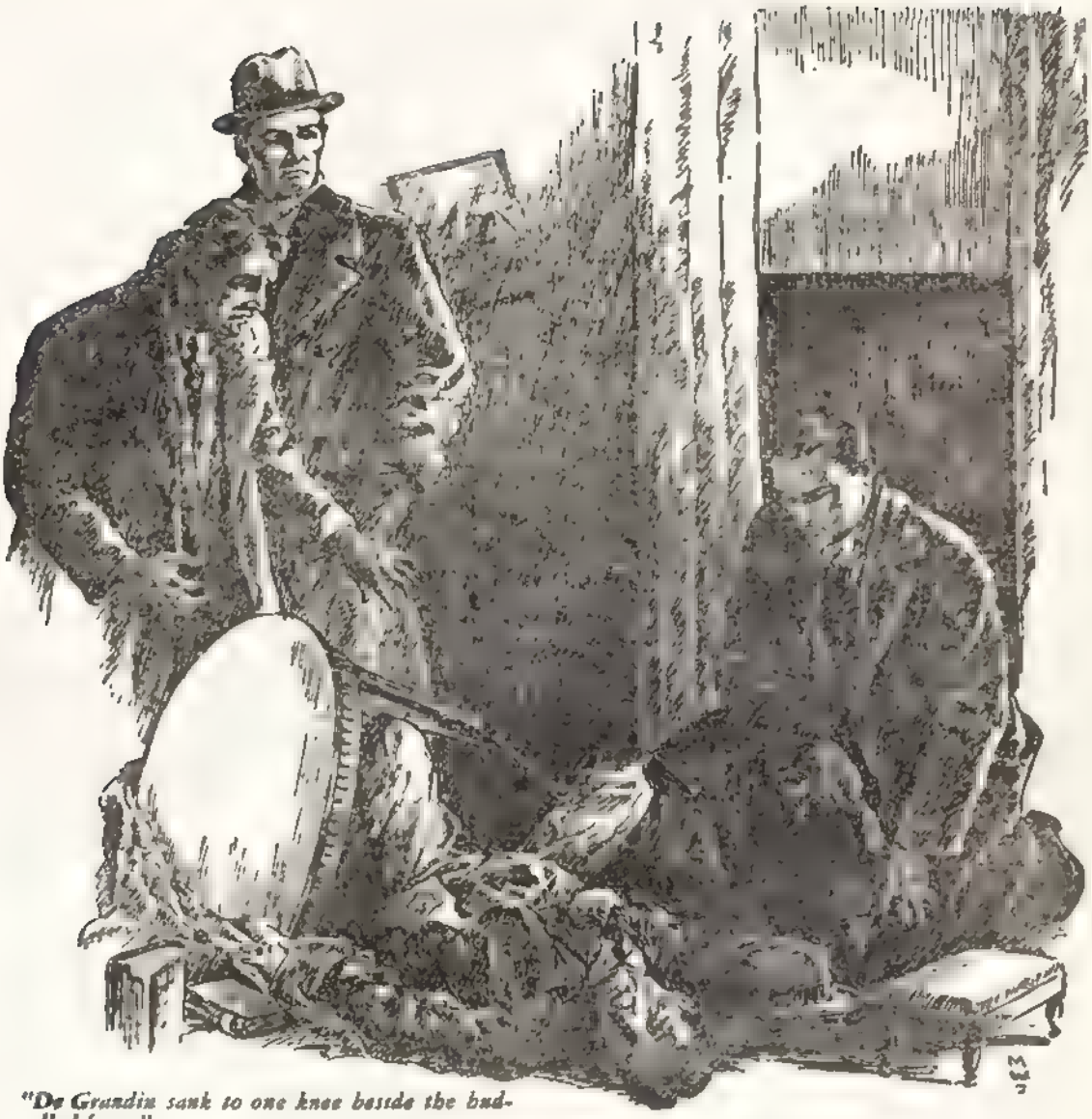
"Go back to Hell and take your idol with you!" he yelled, brandishing his clenched fists to the skies, as the thick shadows receded, flowing back and away from him like the foul waters of some black flood. "Your ancestors were men, though strange and monstrous—but gods, ye have become in ghastly fact what my people called ye in scorn! Worms of the earth, back into your holes and burrows! Ye foul the air and leave on the clean earth the slime of the serpents ye have become! Gonar was right—there are shapes too foul to use even against Rome!"

He sprang from the Ring as a man flees the touch of a coiling snake, and tore the stallion free. At his elbow Atla was shrieking with fearful laughter, all human attributes dropped from her like a cloak in the night.

"King of Pictland!" she cried, "King of fools! Do you blench at so small a thing? Stay and let me show you real fruits of the pits! Ha! ha! ha! Run, fool, run! But you are stained with the taint — you have called them forth and they will remember! And in their own time they will come to you again!"

He yelled a wordless curse and struck her savagely in the mouth with his open hand. She staggered, blood starting from her lips, but her fiendish laughter only rose higher.

Bran leaped into the saddle, wild for the clean heather and the cold blue hills of the north where he could plunge his sword into clean slaughter and his sickened soul into the red maelstrom of battle, and forget the horror which lurked below the fens of the west. He gave the frantic stallion the rein, and rode through the night like a hunted ghost, until the hellish laughter of the howling were-woman died out in the darkness behind.



"De Grandin sank to one knee beside the huddled form."

The Bleeding Mummy

By SEABURY QUINN

A strange tale about Jules de Grandin, and weird deaths that followed the unwrapping of an ancient mummy

OUTSIDE, the midwinter wind hurled wave after wave of a sleet-barrage against the window-panes, keening a ferocious war-chant the while. Within, the glow of sawn railway ties burning on the brass fire-dogs blended pleasantly with the shaded lamplight. Jules de Grandin put aside the copy of *l'Illustration* he had been perusing since dinnertime, stretched his slender, woman-

ishly small feet toward the fire and regarded the gleaming tips of his patent leather pumps with every evidence of satisfaction. "*Tiens,* Friend Trowbridge," he remarked lazily as he watched the leaping firelight quicken in reflection on his polished shoes, "this is most entirely pleasant. Me, not for anything would I leave the house on such a night. He is a fool who quits his cheerful fire to——"

The sharp, peremptory clatter of the front door knocker battered through his words, and before I could hoist myself from my chair the summons was repeated, louder, more insistently.

"I say, Doctor Trowbridge, will you come over to Larson's? I'm afraid something's happened to him—I hate to drag you out on such a night, but I think he really needs a doctor, and——" Young Professor Ellis half staggered into the hall as the driving wind thrust him almost bodily across the doorstep.

"I ran over to see him a few minutes ago," he added as I slammed the door against the storm, "and as I went up his front path I noticed a light burning in an upper window, though the rest of the house was dark. I knocked, but got no answer, then went into the yard to call to him, when all of a sudden I heard him give the most God-awful yell, followed by a shriek of laughter, and as I looked up at his window he seemed to be struggling with something, though there was no one else in the room. I rang his bell a dozen times and pounded on the door, but not another sound came from the house. At first I thought of notifying the police; then I remembered you lived just round the corner, so I came here, instead. If Larson's been taken ill, you can help; if we need the police, there's always time to call 'em, so——"

"*Eh bien,* my friends, why do we stand here talking while the poor Professor Larson is in need of help?" demanded Jules de Grandin from the study door. "Have you no professional pride, Friend Trowbridge? Why do we linger here?"

"Why, you've only finished saying you wouldn't budge from the house tonight," I retorted accusingly. "Do you mean——"

"But certainly I do," he interrupted. "Only two kinds of people can not change their minds, my friend, the foolish and the dead. Jules de Grandin is neither. Come, let us go."

"No use getting out the car," I murmured as we donned our overcoats. "This sleet would make driving impossible."

"Very well, then, let us walk; but let us be about it swiftly," he responded, fairly pushing me through the door and out into the raging night. Heads bent against the howling storm, we set out for Professor Larson's house.

"I didn't exactly have an engagement with Larson," Professor Ellis admitted as we trudged along the street. "Fact is, I expect he'd about as soon have seen the devil as me, but—have you heard about his latest mummy?" he broke off.

"His *what?*" I answered sharply.

"His mummy. He brought it in from Africa last week, and he's been talking about it ever since. This evening he was going to remove the wrappings, so I just ambled over to his house on the off chance he'd let me stick around.

"Larson's a queer chap. Good man in anthropology, and all that, of course, but a lone wolf when it comes to work. He found this mummy by accident in a cleverly hidden tomb near Naga-ed-dêr, and that country was given up as thoroughly worked out thirty years ago, you know. Funny thing about it, too. While they were excavating the sepulcher two of his workmen were bitten by tomb spiders and died in convulsions. That's unusual, for

the Egyptian tomb spider's not particularly venomous, though he's an ugly-looking brute. They'd just about cleared the shaft of rubble and started working toward the funerary chamber when all Larson's *fellaheen* ran out on him, too; but he's a stubborn devil, and he and Foster stuck it out, with the help of such men as they could hire in the neighborhood.

"They had the devil of a time getting the mummy down the Nile, too. Half the crew of their *dehabeeyah* came down with some mysterious fever, and several of 'em died, and the rest deserted; and just as they were ready to sail from Alexandria, Foster, who was Larson's assistant, came down with fever and died within three days. Larson hung on like grim death, though, and brought the mummy through —smuggled it right past the Egyptian customs men disguised as a crate of Smyrna sponges."

"But see here," I interrupted, "both you and Professor Larson are members of the Harrisonville Museum staff. How does it happen he's able to treat this mummy as his personal property? Why didn't he take it to the museum instead of his house?"

Ellis gave a short laugh. "Don't know Larson very well, do you?" he asked. "Didn't I say he's a lone wolf? This expedition to Naga-ed-dêr was a fifty-fifty affair; the Museum paid half the shot, and Larson just about beggared himself to make up the difference. He had a theory there were some valuable Fifth Dynasty relics to be found at Naga, and everybody laughed at him. When he'd justified his theory he was like a spoiled kid with a stick of candy, and wouldn't share his find with any one; when I suggested he let me help him unwrap the thing he told me to take a running jump in the lake. I hadn't an idea, really, he'd let me in when I called on him tonight, but when I heard him yelling and laughing and saw him jumping around like a chestnut on a griddle, I thought maybe he'd gone off his rocker, and ran to get you as quickly as I could. Here we are. We'll probably be told to go to hell for our trouble, but he *might* need help."

As he finished speaking, Ellis sounded a thunderous knock on Larson's door. Only the skirling of the wind around the angle of the house and the flapping of an unsecured window-blind responded.

"*Pardieu,* either he is gravely ill or most abominably deaf, that one!" declared de Grandin, sinking his chin in the fur collar of his coat and grasping at his hat as the storm-wind all but wrenched it from his head.

Ellis turned to us in indecision. "D'ye think——" he began, but:

"Think what you please, my friends, and freeze your feet while doing," the little Frenchman interrupted testily. "Me, I go into that house right away, immediately, this minute." Trying the door and nearest window, and finding both securely fastened, he dashed his gloved hand through the pane without more ado, undid the latch and raised the sash. "Do you follow, or remain behind to perish miserably with cold?" he called as he flung a leg across the sill.

DE GRANDIN in the lead, we felt our way across the darkened drawing-room, across the hall, and up the winding staircase. Every room inside the house, save one, was black as ancient Egypt during the plague of darkness, but a thin stream of light trickling out into the hall from beneath Professor Larson's study door led our footsteps toward his sanctum as a lighthouse guides a ship to port upon a starless night. "Larson!" Ellis called softly, rapping on the study door. "Larson, are you there?"

No answer came, and he seized the door-knob, giving it a tentative twist. The handle turned in his grasp, but the door held firm, for the lock had been shot from the inside.

"One side, if you will be so kind, *Monsieur,*" requested Jules de Grandin, drawing as far back as the width of the hall permitted, then dashing himself forward like a football player battering toward the goal. The flimsy door fell before his rush, and the darkened hall was flooded with a freshet of dazzling light. For a moment we paused on the threshold, blinking owlishly; then:

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed.

"For Gawd's sake!" came Ellis' rejoinder.

"Eh bien, I rather think it is the devil's," Jules de Grandin murmured.

The room before us was a chaos of confusion, as though its contents had been stirred with a monster spoon in the hands of a maliciously mischievous giant. Furniture was overturned; some of the chair covers had been ripped open, as though a ruthless, hurrying searcher had cut the upholstery in search of hidden valuables; pictures hung crazily upon the walls.

In the middle of the study, beneath the glare of a cluster of electric lights, stood a heavy oaken table, and on it lay a mummy-case stripped of its cover, a slender, China-tea-colored form swathed in crisscrossed linen bandages, reclining on the table by the case.

Close to the baseboard of the wall beneath the window crouched a grotesque, unhuman thing, resembling a farmer's cast-off scarecrow or a hopelessly outmoded tailor's dummy. We had to look a second time and strain our unbelieving eyes before we recognized Professor Larson in the crumpled form.

Stepping daintily as a cat on a shower-splashed pavement, de Grandin crossed the room and sank to one knee beside the huddled form, drawing his right glove off as he knelt.

"Is—is he——" Ellis whispered hoarsely, halting at the word of which laymen seem to have a superstitious fear.

"Dead?" de Grandin supplied. *"Mais oui, Monsieur;* like a herring. But he has not been so long. No; I should hazard a guess that he was still living when we left the house to come here."

"But—isn't there something we can do? There must be something——" Ellis asked tremulously.

"But certainly; we can call the coroner," de Grandin answered. "Meanwhile, we might examine this." He nodded toward the mummy lying on the table.

Ellis' humane concern for his dead colleague dropped from him like a worn-out garment as he turned toward the ancient relic, the man eclipsed completely by the anthropologist. "Beautiful—superb!" he murmured ecstatically as he gazed at the unlovely thing. "See, there's no face-mask or funerary statue, either on the mummy or the case. Fifth Dynasty work, as sure as you're alive, and the case is—I say, do you see it?" he broke off, pointing excitedly at the open cedar coffin.

"See it? But certainly," de Grandin answered sharply. "But what is it you find extraordinary, if one may ask?"

"Why, don't you see? There's not a line of writing on that mummy-case! The Egyptians always wrote the titles and biographies of the dead upon their coffins, but this one is just bare, virgin wood. See"—he leant over and tapped the thin, hard shell of cedar—"there's never been a bit of paint or varnish on it! No wonder Larson kept it to himself. Why, there's never been a thing like this discovered since Egyptology became a science!"

De Grandin's glance had wandered from the coffin to the mummy. Now he

brushed past Ellis with his quick, cat-like step and bent above the bandaged form. "The *égyptologie* I do not know so well," he admitted, "but medicine I know perfectly. What do you make of this, *hein?*" His slender forefinger rested for a moment on the linen bands encircling the desiccated figure's left pectoral region.

I started at the words. There was no doubt about it. The left breast, even beneath the mummy-bands, was considerably lower than the right, and faintly, but perceptibly, through the tightly bound linen there showed the faintest trace of brown-red stain. There was no mistaking it. Every surgeon, soldier and embalmer knows that telltale stain at sight.

Professor Ellis' eyes opened till they were nearly as wide as de Grandin's "Blood!" he exclaimed in a muted voice. "Good Lord!" Then:

"But it can't be blood; it simply can't, you know. Mummies were eviscerated and pickled in natron before desiccation; there's no possibility of any blood being left in the body——"

"Oh, no?" the Frenchman's interruption was charged with sarcasm. "Nevertheless, *Monsieur,* de Grandin is too old a fox to be instructed in the art of sucking eggs. Friend Trowbridge" — he turned to me—"how long have you been dealing pills to those afflicted with belly-ache?"

"Why," I answered wonderingly, "about forty years, but——"

"No buts, my friend. Can you, or can you not recognize a blood-stain when you see it?"

"Of course, but——"

"What, then, is this, if you will kindly tell us?"

"Why, blood, of course; any one can tell that——"

"*Précisément*—it is blood, Monsieur Ellis. The good and most reliable Doctor Trowbridge corroborates me. Now, let us examine the coffin of this so remarkable mummy which, despite your pickling in natron and your desiccation, can still shed blood." With a wave of his hand he indicated the case of plain, unvarnished cedar-wood.

"By George, this is unusual, too!" Ellis cried, bending above the coffin. "D'ye see?"

"What?" I queried, for his eyes were shining with excitement as he gazed into the violated casket.

"Why, the way the thing's fastened. Most mummy-case lids are held in place by four little flanges—two on each side—which sink into mortises cut in the lower section and held in place by hardwood dowels. This has eight, three on each side and one at each end. H'm, they must have wanted to make sure whoever was put in there couldn't break loose. And—great Scott, will you look there!" Excitedly he pointed to the bottom of the case.

Once more I looked my wonderment. The abnormalities which struck his practised eye were quite invisible to me.

"See how they've lined the case with spices? I've opened several hundred mummy-cases, but I never saw *that* before."

As he had said, the entire bottom of the coffin was strewn with loose spices to a depth of four inches or so. The aromatics had crumbled to a fine powder, but the mingled clove and cinnamon, aloes and thyme gave off a pungent, almost suffocating aroma as we bent above the bath-tub-like coffin.

De Grandin's small blue eyes were very round and bright as he glanced quickly from me to Ellis, then back again. "I damn think this explains it," he announced. "Unless I am much more mistaken than I think I am, this body never

was a mummy, at least not such a mummy as the old embalmers customarily produced. Will you assist me?" He bowed invitingly to Ellis, placing his hands beneath the mummy's shoulders at the same time.

"Take the feet, if you please, *Monsieur,*" he bade, "and lift it gently—gently, if you please—it must be put exactly where it was until the coroner has viewed the room."

THEY raised the bandaged form six inches or so above the table, then set it down again, and astonishment was written on their faces as they finished.

"What is it?" I asked, completely mystified by their glances of mutual understanding.

"It weighs——" began de Grandin, and:

"Sixty pounds, at least!" completed Ellis.

"Well?"

" 'Well' be everlastingly consigned to Satan's lowest subcellar!" rejoined the little Frenchman sharply. "It is not well at all, my friend; it is completely otherwise. You know your physiology; you know that sixty percent or more of us is water, simply H_2O, such as is found in rivers, and on the tables of Americans in lieu of decent wine. Mummification is dehydration—the watery contents of the body is removed and nothing left but bone and desiccated flesh, a scant forty per cent of the body's weight in life. This body is a small one; in life it could have weighed scarcely a hundred pounds; yet——"

"Why, then, it must have been only partly mummified," I interrupted, but he cut in with:

"Or not at all, my friend. I damn think that we shall find some interesting disclosures when these wrappings are removed. A bleeding mummy, and a mummy which weighs more than half its lifetime weight—yes, the probabilities of a surprize are great, or I am more mistaken than I think.

"Meantime," he turned toward the door, "there is the routine of the law to be complied with. The coroner must be told of Monsieur Larson's death, and there is no need for us to burn these lights while we are waiting."

Bowing politely to us to precede him, he switched off the study lights before closing the door and followed us to the lower hall where the telephone was located.

"I SIMPLY can't imagine how it happened," Professor Ellis murmured, striding nervously across his late colleague's drawing-room while we waited the advent of the coroner. "Larson seemed in the pink of condition this afternoon, and—good Lord, what's that?"

The sound of a terrific struggle, like that of two men locked in a death-grip, echoed through the quiet house.

Thump — thump — thump! Heavy, pounding footsteps banged upon the floor above our heads; then crash! came a smashing impact, as of overturning furniture, a momentary pause, a strident scream and the sudden crescendo of a wild, discordant laugh. Then silence once again.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, panic grasping at my throat. "Why, it's directly overhead—in the study, where we left the mummy and——"

"Impossible!" Professor Ellis contradicted. "Nobody could have gotten past us to that room, and——"

"Impossible or not, Friend Trowbridge speaks the truth, by damn!" the little Frenchman shouted, springing from his chair and racing toward the stairs. "*En avant, mes enfants*—follow me!"

Three steps at a stride he mounted

headlong up the stairway, paused a moment at the closed door of the study while he whipped a pistol from his pocket, then, his weapon swinging in a circle before him, advanced with a quick leap, snapped on the lights and:

"Hands up!" he shouted warningly. "A single offer of resistance and you breakfast with the devil in the morning —*grand Dieu,* my friends, behold!"

Save that one or two chairs had been overset, the room was just as we had left it. Upon the table lay the supine, bandaged mummy, its spice-filled case uncovered by its side; the thing which had been Larson crouched shoulders-to-the wall, as though stricken in an attempt to turn a somersault; the window-blind flapped cracklingly in the chilling winter wind.

"The window—it's open!" cried Professor Ellis. "It was closed when we were here, but——"

"*Dieu de Dieu de Dieu de Dieu*—does not one know it?" de Grandin interrupted angrily, striding toward the open casement. "*Parbleu,* the way in which you pounce upon the obvious is greatly trying to my nerves, Friend Ellis, and—*ah? A-a-a-ah?* One sees, one perceives, one understands—almost!"

Abreast of him, we gazed across the sill, and obedient to the mute command of his pointing finger, looked at the snow-encrusted roof of the first floor bay-window which joined the house-wall something like two feet below the study window. Gouged in the dead-white veneer of snow were four long, parallel streaks, exposing the slate beneath. "U'm," he murmured, lowering the sash and turning toward the door, "the mystery is in part explained, my friends.

"That window, it would be the logical place for a burglar to force entry," he added as we trooped down the stairs. "The roof of the bay-window has but very little slope, and stands directly underneath the window of Professor Larson's study. One bent on burglary could hardly fail to note its possibilities as an aid to crime, and the fact that we had light going only in the downstairs room was notice to the world that the upper story was untenanted. So——"

"Quite so, but there wasn't any burglar there," Ellis interrupted practically.

De Grandin favored him with such a stare as a teacher might bestow on a more than ordinarily dull pupil. "One quite agrees, *mon ami,*" he replied. "However, if you will have the exceeding goodness to restrain your curiosity—and conversation—for a time, it may be we shall find that which we seek."

The dark, hunched-up object showed with startling vividness against the background of the snow-powdered lawn as we descended from the porch. De Grandin knelt beside it and struck a match to aid in his inspection. It was a ragged, unkempt figure, unwashed, unshaven; a typical low-class sneak-thief who had varied his customary sorry trade with an excursion into the higher profession of housebreaking with disastrous results to himself. He crouched as he had fallen from the bay-window's sloping roof, one arm twisted underneath him, his head bent oddly to one side, his battered, age-discolored hat mashed in at the crown and driven comically down upon his head till his ears were bent beneath it. Little lodes of sleety snow had lodged within the wrinkles of his ragged coat, and tiny threads of icicles had formed on his mustache.

The man was dead, no doubt of it. No one, not even the most accomplished contortionist, could twist his neck at that sharp angle. And the manner of his death was obvious. Frightened at sight

of the mummy, the poor fellow had endeavored to effect a hasty exit by the open window, had slipped upon the sleet-glazed roof of the bay-window and fallen to the ground, striking head-first and skidding forward with his full weight on his twisted neck.

I voiced my conclusions hastily, but de Grandin shook a puzzled head. "One understands the manner of his death," he answered thoughtfully, "but the reason, that is something else again. We can well think that such a creature would have a paralyzing fear when he beheld the mummy stretched upon the table, but that does not explain the antics he went through before he fell or jumped back through the window he had forced. We heard him thrash about; we heard him kick the furniture; we heard him scream with mirthless laughter. For why? Frightened men may scream, they sometimes even laugh hysterically, but what was there for him to wrestle with?"

"That's just what Larson did!" Professor Ellis put in hastily. "Don't you remember——"

"*Exactement,*" the Frenchman answered with a puzzled frown. "Professor Larson cries aloud and fights with nothing; this luckless burglar breaks into the very room where Monsieur Larson died so strange a death, and he, too, wrestles with the empty air and falls to death while laughing hideously. There is something very devilish here, my friends."

When we had gone back in the house young Ellis looked at us with something very near to panic in his eyes. "You say that we must leave that mummy as it is until the coroner has seen it?" he demanded.

"Your understanding is correct, my friend," de Grandin answered.

"All right, we'll leave the dam' thing there, but just as soon as Mr. Martin has finished with it, I think we'd better take it out and burn it."

"Eh, what is it that you say? Burn it, *Monsieur?*" de Grandin asked.

"Just that. It's what the Egyptologists call an 'unlucky' mummy, and the sooner we get rid of it the healthier it'll be for all of us, I'm thinking. See here"—he glanced quickly upward, as though fearing a renewed outbreak in the room above, then turned again to us—"do you recall the series of fatalities following Tutankhamen's exhumation?"

De Grandin made no answer, but the fixed, unwinking stare he leveled on the speaker, and the nervous way his trimly waxed mustache quivered at the corners of his mouth betrayed his interest.

Ellis hurried on: "Call it nonsense if you will—and you probably will—but the fact is there seems something in this talk of the ancient gods of Egypt having power to curse those disturbing the mummies of people dying in apostasy. You know, I assume, that there are certain mummies known as 'unlucky'—unlucky for those who find them, or have anything to do with them? Tutankhamen is probably the latest, as well as the most outstanding example of this class. He was a heretic in his day, and had offended the 'old ones' or their priests, which amounted to the same thing. So, when he died, they buried him with elaborate ceremonies, but set no image of Amen-Ra at the bow of the boat which carried him across the lake of the dead, and the plaques of Tem, Seb, Nephthys, Osiris and Isis were not prepared to go with him into the tomb. Tutankhamen, notwithstanding his belated efforts at reconciliation with the priesthood, was little better than an atheist according to contemporary Egyptian belief, and the wrath of the gods went into the tomb with him. It was not their wish

that his name be preserved to posterity or that any of his relics be brought to light again.

"Now, think what happened: When Lord Carnarvon located the tomb, he had four associates. Carnarvon and three of his helpers are dead today. Colonel Herbert and Doctor Evelyn-White were among the first to go into Tut's tomb. Both died within a year. Sir Archibald Douglas was engaged to make an X-ray —he died almost before the plates could be developed. Six out of seven French journalists who went into the tomb shortly after it was opened died in less than a year, and almost every workman engaged in the excavations died before he had a chance to spend his pay. Some of these men died one way, some another, but the point is: they all died.

"Not only that; even minor articles taken from the tomb seem to exercise a malign influence. There is absolute proof that attendants in the Cairo Museum whose duties keep them near the Tutankhamen relics sicken and die for no apparent reason. D'ye wonder they call him an 'unlucky' mummy?"

"Very good, *Monsieur;* what then?" de Grandin prompted as the other lapsed into a moody silence.

"Just this: That mummy-case upstairs is bare of painting as the palm of your hand, and the orthodox Egyptians of the Fifth Dynasty would no more have thought of putting a body away without suitable biographical and religious writings on the coffin than the average American family today would think of holding a funeral without religious services of some sort. Further than that, the evidence points to that body's never having been embalmed at all—apparently it was merely wrapped and put into a coffin with a layer of spices around it. Embalming had religious significance in ancient Egypt. If the flesh corrupted, the spirit could not return at the end of the prescribed cycle and reanimate it, and to be buried unembalmed was tantamount to a denial of immortality. This body had only the poorest makeshift attempt at preservation. It looks as though this person, whoever he was, died outside the religious pale, doesn't it?"

"You make out a strong case, *Monsieur,*" de Grandin nodded, "but——"

"All right, then look at the thing's history so far: Larson's workmen died while working in the tomb. How? By tomb-spider bite!

"Bosh! A tomb-spider is hardly more poisonous than our own garden spiders. I know; I've been bitten by the things, and suffered less inconvenience than when a scorpion stung me in Yucatan.

"Then, on the passage down the Nile most of the boat crew sickened, and some of 'em died, with a strange fever; yet they were hardy devils, used to the climate and in all probability immune to anything in the way of illness the country could produce. Then Foster, Larson's assistant, pegged out just as they were setting sail from Egypt. Looks as though some evil influence were working, doesn't it?

"Now, tonight: Larson was all ready to unwrap the mummy, but never got past taking it from the box. He's dead—'dead like a herring,' as you put it—and only God knows how he died. Right while we're waiting for the coroner to come, this poor devil of a burglar breaks into the house, *fights with some unseen thing,* just as Larson did, and dies. Say what you will" — his voice rose almost to a scream—"there's an aura of terrible misfortune round that mummy, and death is waiting for whoever ventures near it!"

De Grandin patted the waxed ends of his diminutive mustache affectionately. "What you say may all be true, *Mon-*

sieur," he conceded, "but the fact remains that both Doctor Trowbridge and I have been near the mummy; yet we were never better in our lives—though I could do nicely with a gulp or so of brandy at this time. Not only that, Professor Larson spent nearly his entire fortune and a considerable portion of the Museum's funds in finding this so remarkable cadaver. It would be larceny, no less, for us to burn it as you suggest."

"All right," Ellis answered with a note of finality in his voice. "Have it your own way. As soon as the coroner's through with me I'm going home. I wouldn't go near that cursed mummy again for a fortune."

"HULLO, Doctor de Grandin," Coroner Martin greeted, stamping his feet and shaking the snow from his coat. "Bad business, this, isn't it? Any idea as to the cause of death?"

"The one outside unquestionably died from a broken neck," the Frenchman answered. "As for Professor Larson——"

"Eh, the one outside?" Mr. Martin interrupted. "Are there *two* of 'em?"

"Humph, we're lucky there aren't five," Ellis cut in bitterly. "They have been dying so fast we can't keep track of 'em since Larson started to unwrap that——"

"One moment, if you please, *Monsieur,"* de Grandin interrupted as he raised a deprecating hand. "Monsieur the Coroner is a busy man and has his duties to perform. When they have been completed I make no doubt he will be glad to listen to your interesting theories. At present"—he bowed politely to the coroner—"will you come with us, *Monsieur?"* he asked.

"Count me out," said Ellis. "I'll wait down here, and I want to warn you that——"

We never heard the warning he had for us; for, de Grandin in the lead, we mounted the stairs to the study where Professor Larson and the mummy lay.

"H'm," Mr. Martin, who in addition to being coroner was also the city's leading funeral director, surveyed the room with a quick, practised glance, "this looks almost as if——" he strode across the room toward Larson's hunched-up body and extended one hand, but:

"Grand Dieu des cochons—stand back, *Monsieur!"* de Grandin's shouted admonition halted Mr. Martin in mid-stride. "Back, *Monsieur;* back, Friend Trowbridge—for your lives!" Snatching me by the elbow and Mr. Martin by the skirt of his coat, he fairly dragged us from the room.

"What on earth——" I began as we reached the hall, but he pushed us toward the stairway.

"Do not stand and parley!" he commanded shortly. "Out—out into the friendly cold, while there is still time, my friends! *Pardieu,* I see it now—Monsieur Ellis has right; that mummy——"

"Oh—*oh—o-o-o-oh!"* The sudden cry came to us from the floor below, followed by the sound of scuffling, as though Ellis and another were struggling madly. Then came an awful, marrow-freezing laugh, shrill, mirthless, sardonic.

"Sang du diable — it has him!" de Grandin shouted, as he rushed madly toward the stair, leaped to the balustrade and shot downward like a meteor.

Coroner Martin and I followed more sedately, and found the Frenchman standing mute and breathless at the entrance of the drawing-room, his thin, red lips pursed as though emitting a soundless whistle. Professor Larson's parlor was furnished in the formal, stilted style so popular in the late years of the last century, light chairs and couches of gilded wood upholstered in apple-green satin, a

glass-doored cabinet for bric-a-brac, a pair of delicate spindle-legged tables adorned with bits of Dresden china. The furniture had been tossed about the room, the light-gray velvet rug turned up, the china-cabinet smashed and flung upon its side. In the midst of the confusion Ellis lay, his hands clenched at his sides, his knees drawn up, his lips retracted in a grim, sardonic grin.

"Good God!" Coroner Martin viewed the poor, tensed body with staring eyes. "This is dreadful——"

"*Cordieu,* it will be more so if we linger here!" de Grandin cried. "Outside, my friends. Do not wait to take your coats or hats—come out at once! I tell you death is lurking in each shadow of this cursed place!"

He herded us before him from the house, and bade us stand a moment, hatless and coatless, in the chilling wind. "I say," I protested through chattering teeth, "this is carrying a joke too far, de Grandin. There's no need to——"

"Joke?" he echoed sharply. "Do you consider it a joke that Professor Larson died the way he did tonight; that the misguided burglar perished in the same way; that even now the poor young Ellis lies all stiff and dead inside that cursed hell-hole of a house? Your sense of humor is peculiar, my friend."

"What was it?" Coroner Martin asked practically. "Was there some infection in the house that made Professor Ellis scream like that before he died, or was it——"

"Tell me, *Monsieur,*" de Grandin interrupted, "have you facilities for fumigation at your mortuary?"

"Of course," the coroner returned wonderingly. "We've apparatus for making both formaldehyde and cyanogen gas, depending on the class of fumigation required, but——"

"Very good. Be so good as to hasten to your place of business and return as quickly as may be with *materiel* for cyanogen fumigation. I shall await you here. Make haste, *Monsieur,* this matter *is* of utmost urgency, I assure you."

While Mr. Martin was obtaining the apparatus for fumigation, de Grandin and I hastened to my house, procured fresh outdoor clothing and retraced our steps. Though I made several attempts to discover what he had found at Larson's, his only answers were impatient shrugs and half-articulate exclamations, and I finally gave over the attempt, knowing he would explain in detail when he thought it proper. Hands deep in pockets, heads drawn well down into our collars, we waited for the coroner's return.

With the deftness of long practise Mr. Martin's assistants set the tanks of mercuric cyanide in place at the front and back doors of the Larson house, ran rubber hose from them to the keyholes and lighted spirit lamps beneath them. When Mr. Martin suggested that the bodies be removed before fumigation began, de Grandin shook his head decidedly. "It would be death—or most unnecessary risk of death, at best—to permit your men to enter till the gas has had at least a day to work within the house," he answered.

"But those bodies should be cared for," the coroner contended, speaking from the professional knowledge of one who had practised mortuary science for more than twenty years.

"They will undergo no putrefactive changes worthy of account," the Frenchman answered. "The gas will act to some extent as a preservative, and the risk to be avoided is worth the trouble."

As Coroner Martin was about to counter, he continued: "Demonstration outweighs explanation ten to one, my friend. Permit that I should have my way, and by

this time tomorrow night you will be convinced of the good foundation for my seeming stubbornness."

SHORTLY after eight o'clock the following evening we met once more at Larson's house, and as calmly as though such crazy actions were an everyday affair with him, de Grandin smashed window after window with his walking-stick, and bade us wait outside for upward of a quarter-hour. At last:

"I think that it is safe to enter now," he said. "The gas should be dispelled. Come, let us go in."

We tiptoed down the hall to the drawing-room where Professor Ellis lay, and de Grandin turned on every available light before entering the room. Beside the young man's rigid body he went to his knees, and seemed to be examining the floor with minutest care. "Whatever are you doing——" I began, when:

"*Triomphe,* I have found him!" he announced. "Come and see."

We crossed the room and stared in wonder at the tiny object which he held between the thumb and finger of his gloved right hand. It was a tiny, ball-like thing, scarcely larger than a dried bean, a little, hairy spider with a black body striped about the abdomen with lines of vivid vermilion. "You observe him?" he asked simply. "Was I not wise to order our retreat last night?"

"What is the thing?" I demanded. "It's harmless-looking enough, but——"

"*Eh bien,* there is a very great but there, my friend," he retorted with a mirthless smile. "You saw what had been Monsieur Larson; you looked upon the poor, new-dead young Ellis? This—this little, seemingly so harmless thing it was which killed them. It is a *katipo,* or *latrodectus Nasselti,* the deadliest spider in the world. Even the cobra's bite is but a sweetheart's kiss beside the sting of this so small, deadly thing. Those bit by him are seized immediately with convulsions—they beat the air, they stumble and they whirl, at length they give vent to a dreadful scream which simulates a laugh. And then they fall and die.

"Does not that make it clear? The wholly irrational antics performed by Professor Larson ere he died could be explained in no sane manner. They puzzled me. I was not willing to accept Professor Ellis' theory that the mummy was 'unlucky,' although, as the good God knows, it proved so for him. However, that Professor Larson was entirely dead could not be doubted, nor could one readily assign a reason for his death. *Tiens,* in such a case the coroner must be called, and so we telephoned for Monsieur Martin.

"Meantime, as we sat waiting in this room, a poor, half-starving devil of a man decided he would break into the house and steal whatever he could find. He mounted the bay-window's roof, and, guided by his evil star, set foot inside the chamber where the mummy and Professor Larson lay. We heard him trample on the floor; we heard him give that dreadful, laughing scream; we searched for him, and found him dead upon the lawn.

"Very good. In due time Monsieur Martin comes; we lead him to the place where Monsieur Larson is, and as we go into the room I chance to look into the spices strewn about the bottom of that mummy-case. *Ha*—what is it that I see? *Parbleu,* I see a movement! Spices do not move, my friend, except they be blown on by the wind, and there is no wind in that room. Moreover, spices are not jetty-black with bands of red about their bellies. *Non, pardieu,* but certain spiders are. I see him and I know him. In the Eastern Islands, in Java, in Australia, I have seen him, and I have also seen his

deadly work. He is the *latrodectus Nasselti,* called *katipo* by the natives, and his bite is almost instant and most painful death. More, those bitten by him dance about insanely in a sort of frantic seizure; they laugh—but not with happiness!—they scream with mirthless laughter; then they die. I did not wish to dance and laugh and die, my friends; I did not wish that you should do so, either. There was no time for talk or explanation; our only safety lay in flight, for they are tropic things, those spiders, and once we were outside the cold would kill them. I was about to call a warning to Monsieur Ellis, too; but I was, *hélas,* too late.

"Beyond a doubt one of the spiders had fastened on his clothing while he bent over to inspect that mummy-case. The insect clung to him when he left the room, and while he waited downstairs for us it crawled until it came in contact with his naked skin; then, angered, it may be, by some movement which he made, it bit him and he died.

"When I saw him lying here upon the floor I took incontinently to flight. Jules de Grandin is no coward, but who could say how many of those cursed spiders had crawled from the mummy-case and found hiding-places in the shadows—even in our clothing, as in the case of Monsieur Ellis? To stay here was to court a quick and highly disagreeable death; accordingly I rushed you out into the storm and asked Monsieur Martin to provide fumigation for the house forthwith. Now, since the cyanogen gas has killed every living thing inside this house, it is safe for us to enter.

"The bodies may safely be taken away by your assistants at any time, *Monsieur,*" he finished with a bow to Mr. Martin.

"*EH BIEN,* were he but here, we could set poor Monsieur Ellis' mind at rest concerning many things," de Grandin murmured as we drove toward my house. "He could not understand how Professor Larson's servants died by spider-bite, since the Egyptian tomb-spider is known to be innocuous, or nearly so. The answer now is obvious. In some way which we do not understand, a number of those poisonous black spiders found their way into that mummy-case. They are terrestrial in their habits, living in the earth and going forth by night. Light irritates them, and when the workmen brought their torches into the tomb they showed their annoyance by biting them. Death, accompanied by convulsions, followed, and because the small black spiders were invisible in the shadows, the harmless tomb-spiders received the blame. Some few of the black spiders came overseas with Professor Larson; when he pried the lid from that mummy-case—perhaps when he thrust his hand into the scattered spices to lift the mummy out—they fastened on him, bit him; killed him. You apprehend?"

"H'm, it sounds logical enough," I answered thoughtfully, "but have you any idea how those spices came in that coffin? Poor Ellis seemed to think we'd hit on something extraordinary when he saw them; but he's gone now and — great Scott, de Grandin, d'ye suppose those old Egyptian priests could have planted spider eggs among the spices, hoping they would hatch eventually, so that whoever molested the body in years to come would stand a chance of being bitten and killed?"

For a moment he drummed soundlessly with gloved fingers on the silver head of his stick. At length: "My friend, you interest me," he declared solemnly. "I do not know that what you say is probable, but the manner of that mummy's preparation is unusual. I think we owe it as a debt to poor, dead Ellis to look into the matter thoroughly."

"Look into it? How——"

"Tomorrow we shall unwrap the body," he responded as casually as though unshrouding centuries-old dead Egyptians were an everyday activity with us. "If we can find some explanation hidden in the mummy-clothes, well and good. If we do not—*eh bien,* the dead have spoken before; why not again?"

"The—dead—have—spoken?" I echoed slowly, incredulously. "What in the world——"

"Not in this world, precisely," he interrupted with the shadow of a smile, "but there are those who look behind the veil which separates us from the ones we call the dead, my friend. We shall try other methods first. Those failing——" he recommenced his drumming on the handle of his cane, humming softly:

"Sacré de nom,
Ron, ron et ron;
La vie est brève,
La nuit est longue——"

NEXT evening we unwrapped the mummy.

It was an oddly assorted group which gathered in the basement of Harrisonville Museum to denude the ancient dead of its cerements. Hodgson, the assistant curator of the department of archeology, a slender little man in gold-bowed, rimless spectacles, bald to the ears and much addicted to the habit of buttoning and unbuttoning his primly untidy double-breasted jacket, stood by in state of twittering nervousness as de Grandin set to work.

"Who sups with the devil needs a long spoon," the little Frenchman quoted with a smile as he drew a pair of heavy rubber gloves on his hands before taking up his scissors and snipping one of the criss-crossed linen bands with which the body was tightly wrapped. "I do not greatly fear that any of those small black imps of hell survived Monsieur Martin's gas," he added, laying back a fold of yellowed linen, "but it is well to be prepared. The cemeteries are full to overflowing with those who have thought otherwise."

Yard after endless yard of linen he reeled off, coming at length to a strong, seamless shroud drawn sackwise over the body and tied at the feet with a stout cord. The cloth of which the sack was made seemed stronger and heavier than the bandages, and was thickly coated with wax or some ceraceous substance, the whole being, apparently, airtight and watertight.

"Why, bless my soul, I never saw anything like *this* before," stammered Doctor Hodgson, leaning forward across de Grandin's shoulder to stare curiously at the inner shroud.

"So much we gathered from Monsieur Ellis before—when he first viewed this body," de Grandin answered dryly, and Professor Hodgson retreated with an odd little squeaking exclamation, for all the world like that of an intimidated mouse.

"Sale lâche!" the Frenchman whispered softly, his contempt of Hodgson's cowardice written plainly on his face. Then, as he cut the binding string away and began twitching the waxed shroud upward from the mummy's shoulders:

"Ah ha? Ah-ha-ha—que diable?"

The body brought to view beneath the blue-white glare of the electric bulbs was not technically a mummy; though the aromatic spices and the sterile, arid atmosphere of Egypt had combined to keep it in a state of most unusual preservation. The feet, first parts to be exposed, were small and beautifully formed, with long, straight toes and narrow heels, the digits and soles, as well as the whole plantar region, stained brilliant red. There was surprizingly little desiccation, and though the terminal tendons of the *brevis digito-*

rum showed prominently through the skin, the effect was by no means revolting; I had seen equal prominence of flexor muscles in living feet where the patient had suffered considerable emaciation.

The ankles were sharp and shapely, the legs straight and well turned, with the leanness of youth, rather than the wasted look of death; the hips were narrow, the waist slender and the gentle swelling bosoms high and sharp. Making allowance for the early age at which women of the Orient mature, I should have said the girl died somewhere in her middle teens; certainly well under twenty.

"Ah?" de Grandin murmured as the waxed sack slid over the body's shoulders. "I think that here we have the explanation of those stains, Friend Trowbridge, *n'est-ce-pas?"*

I looked and gulped back an exclamation of horrified amazement. The slim, tapering arms had been folded on the breast, in accordance with the Egyptian custom, but the humerus of the left arm had been cruelly crushed, a compound comminutive fracture having resulted, so that a quarter-inch or more of splintered bone thrust through the skin above and below the deltoid attachment. Not only this: the same blow which had crushed the arm had smashed the bony structure of the chest, the third and fourth left ribs being snapped in two, and through the smooth skin underneath the breast a prong of jagged bone protruded. A hemorrhage of considerable extent had followed, and the long-dried blood lay upon the body from left breast to hip in a dull, brown-red veneer. Waxed though the mummy-sack had been, the welling blood had found its way through some break in the coating, had soaked the tightly knotted outer bandages, and borne mute testimony of an ancient tragedy.

The finely cut features were those of a woman in her early youth. Semitic in their cast, they had a delicacy of line and contour which bespoke patrician breeding. The nose was small, slightly aquiline, high-bridged, with narrow nostrils. The lips were thin and sensitive, and where they had retracted in the process of partial desiccation, showed small, sharp teeth of startling whiteness. The hair was black and lustrous, cut short off at the ears, like the modern Dutch bob affected by young women, parted in the middle and bound about the brows with a circlet of hammered gold set with small studs of lapis lazuli. For the rest, a triple-stranded necklace of gold and blue enamel, armlets of the same design and a narrow golden girdle fashioned like a snake composed the dead girl's costume. Originally a full, plaited skirt of sheer white linen had been appended to the girdle, but the fragile fabric had not withstood the years of waiting in the grave, and only one or two thin wisps of it remained.

"La pauvre!" exclaimed the Frenchman, gazing sadly at the broken little body. "I think, my friends, that we see here a demonstration of that ancient saying that the blood of innocents can not be concealed. Unless I am more wrong than I admit, this is a case of murder, and——"

"But it might as well have been an accident," I cut in. "I've seen such injuries in motor-wrecks, and this poor child might have been the victim of a chariot smashup."

"I do not think so," he returned. "This case has all the marks of ritual murder, my friend. Observe the——"

"I think we'd better wrap the body up again," Hodgson broke in hastily. "We've gone as far as we can tonight, and—well, I'm rather tired, gentlemen, and if you don't mind, we'll call the session off." He coughed apologetically, but there was the mild determination of weak men who

have authority to make their wishes law in his manner as he spoke.

"You mean that you're afraid of something that might happen?" de Grandin countered bluntly. "You fear the ancient gods may take offense at our remaining here to speculate on the manner of this poor one's death?"

"Well," Hodgson took his glasses off and wiped them nervously, "of course, I don't believe those stories that they tell of these 'unlucky' mummies, but—you're bound to admit there have been some unexplained fatalities connected with this case. Besides—well, frankly, gentlemen, this body's less a mummy than a corpse, and I've a terrible aversion to being around the dead, unless they've been mummified."

De Grandin smiled sarcastically. "The old-time fears die hard," he assented. "Nevertheless, *Monsieur,* we shall respect your sensibilities. You have been most kind, and we would not try your nerves still further. Tomorrow, if you do not mind, we shall pursue our researches. It may be possible that we shall discover something hitherto unknown about the rites and ceremonies of those old ones who ruled the world when Rome had scarce been thought of."

"Yes, yes; of course," Hodgson coughed as he edged near the door. "I'm sure I shall be happy to give you a pass to the Museum tomorrow—only"—he added as an afterthought— "I must ask that you refrain from mutilating the body in any way. It belongs to the Museum, you know, and I simply can not give permission for an autopsy."

"Morbleu, but you are the shrewd guesser, *Monsieur,"* de Grandin answered with a laugh. "I think you must have read intention in my eyes. Very well; we consent. There shall be no post-mortem of the body made. *Bon soir, Monsieur."*

"I'M SORRY, Doctor de Grandin," Hodgson greeted us the next morning, "but I'm afraid you'll not be able to pursue any further investigations with the mummy — the body, I mean — we unwrapped last night."

The little Frenchman stiffened in both body and manner. "You mean that you have altered your decision, *Monsieur?"* he asked with cold politeness.

"Not at all. I mean the body's disintegrated with exposure to the air, and only a few wisps of hair, the skull and some unarticulated bones remain. While they weren't quite airtight, the bandages and the wax-coated shroud seem to have been able to keep the flesh intact, but exposure to our damp atmosphere has reduced them to a heap of bone and dust."

"U'm," the Frenchman answered. "That is unfortunate, but not irreparable. I think our chance of finding out the cause and manner of the poor young lady's death is not yet gone. Would you be good enough to lend us the ornaments, some of the mummy-cloth and several of the bones, *Monsieur?* We guarantee their safe return."

"Well," Hodgson hesitated momentarily, "it's not quite regular, but if you're sure you will return them——"

"Monsieur," de Grandin's voice broke sharply through the curator's apologetic half-refusal, "I am Jules de Grandin; I am not accustomed to having my good faith assailed. No matter, the experiment which I have in mind will not take long, and you are welcome to accompany us. Thus you need never have the relics out of sight at any time. Will that assure you of their safe return?"

Hodgson undid the buttons of his jacket, then did them up again. "Oh, don't think I was doubting your *bona fides,"* he returned, "but this body cost the Museum a considerable sum, and was the

indirect cause of our losing two valuable members of the staff. I'm personally responsible for it, and——"

"No matter," de Grandin interrupted, "if you will come with us I can assure you that the articles will be within your sight at all times, and you may have them back again this morning."

Accordingly, Hodgson superintending fussily, we selected the gold and lapis lazuli diadem, the broken humerus, one of the fractured ribs and several lengths of mummy-cloth which bore the dull-red blood stains, and thrust them into a traveling-bag. De Grandin paused to call a number on the 'phone, talked for a moment in a muted tone, then directed me to an address in Scotland Road.

HALF an hour's drive through the brisk winter air brought us to a substantial brownstone-fronted residence in the decaying but still eminently respectable neighborhood. Lace curtains hung at the tall windows of the first floor and the windows of the basement dining-room were neatly draped with scrim. Beside the carefully polished bell-pull a brass plate with the legend, *Creighton, Clairvoyant,* was set. A neat maid in black and white uniform responded to de Grandin's ring and led us to a drawing-room rather overfurnished with heavy pieces of the style popular in the middle nineties. "Mrs. Creighton will be down immediately, sir; she's expecting you," she told him as she left the room.

My experience with those who claim ability to "look beyond the veil" was limited, but I had always imagined that they set their stages more effectively than this. The carpet, patterned with impossible roses large as cabbages, the heavy and not especially comfortable golden oak chairs upholstered in green plush, the stereotyped oil paintings of the Grand Canal, of Capri by moonlight and Vesuvius in action, were pragmatic as a plate of prunes, and might have been duplicated, item by item, in the "parlor" of half a hundred non-fashionable but respectable boarding-houses. Even the faint aroma of cooking food which wafted up to us from the downstairs kitchen had a reassuring and worldly tang which seemed entirely out of harmony with the ghostly calling of our hostess.

Madame Creighton fitted her surroundings perfectly. She was short, stout and matronly, and her high-necked white linen blouse and plain blue skirts were far more typical of the busy middle-class housewife than of the self-admitted medium. Her eyes, brown and bright, shone pleasantly behind the lenses of neat, rimless spectacles; her hair, already shot with gray, was drawn tightly back from her forehead and twisted in a commonplace knot above her occiput. Even her hands were plump, short-fingered, slightly work-worn and wholly commonplace. Nowhere was there any indication of the "psychic" in her dress, face, form or manner.

"You brought the things?" she asked de Grandin when introductions were completed.

Nodding, he placed the relics on the oaken table beside which she was seated. "These were discovered——" he began, but she raised her hand in warning.

"Please don't tell me anything about them," she requested. "I'd rather my controls did all that, for one never can be sure how much information secured while one is conscious may be carried over into the subconscious while the trance is on, you know."

Opening a drawer in the table she took out a hinged double slate and a box of thin, white chalk.

"Will you hold this, Doctor Trow-

bridge?" she asked, handing me the slate. "Take it in both hands, please, and hold it in your lap. Please don't move it or attempt to speak to me until I tell you."

Awkwardly I took the blank-faced slate and balanced it on my knees while Mrs. Creighton drew a small crystal ball from a little green-felt bag, placed it on the table between the broken arm-bone and the fractured rib, then, with a snap of the switch, set an electric light in a gooseneck fixture standing on the table aglow. The luminance from the glowing bulb shone directly on the crystal sphere, causing it to glow as though with inward fire.

For a little time—two minutes, perhaps—she gazed intently at the glass ball; then her eyes closed and her head, resting easily against the crocheted doily on the back of her rocking-chair, moved a little sidewise as her neck muscles relaxed. For a moment she rested thus, her regular breathing only slightly audible.

Suddenly, astonishingly, I heard a movement of the chalk between the slates. I had not moved or tilted them, there was no chance the little pencil could have rolled, yet unquestionably the thing was moving. Now, I distinctly *felt* it as it traveled slowly back and forth across the tightly folded leaves of the slate, gradually increasing its speed till it seemed like a panic-stricken prisoned thing rushing wildly round its dungeon in search of escape.

I had a momentary wild, unreasoning desire to fling that haunted slate away from me and rush out of that stuffy room, but pride held me in my chair, pride made me grip those slates as a drowning man might grip a rope; pride kept my gaze resolutely on Mrs. Creighton and off of the uncanny thing which balanced on my knees.

I could hear de Grandin breathing quickly, hear Hodgson moving restlessly in his chair, clearing his throat and (I knew this without looking) buttoning and unbuttoning his coat.

Mrs. Creighton's sleep became troubled. Her head rolled slowly, fretfully from side to side, and her breathing became stertorous; once or twice she gave vent to a feeble moan; finally the groaning, choking cry of a sleeper in a nightmare. Her smooth, plump hands clenched nervously and doubled into fists, her arms and legs twitched tremblingly; at length she straightened stiffly in her chair, rigid as though shocked by a galvanic battery, and from her parted lips there came a muffled, strangling cry of horror. Little flecks of foam formed at the corners of her mouth, she arched her body upward, then sank back with a low, despairing whimper, and her firm chin sagged down toward her breast—I knew the symptoms! No medical practitioner can fail to recognize those signs.

"Madame!" de Grandin cried, rising from his chair and rushing to her side. "You are unwell—you suffer?"

She struggled to a sitting posture, her brown eyes bulging as though a savage hand were on her throat, her face contorted with some dreadful fear. For a moment she sat thus; then, with a shake of her head, she straightened, smoothed her hair, and asked matter-of-factly: "Did I say anything?"

"No, *Madame,* you said nothing articulate, but you seemed in pain, so I awakened you."

"Oh, that's too bad," she answered with a smile. "They tell me I often act that way when in a trance, but I never remember anything when I wake up, and I never seem any the worse because of anything I dream while I'm unconscious. If you had only waited we might have had a message on the slate."

"We have!" I interrupted. "I heard

the pencil writing like mad, and nearly threw the thing away!"

"Oh, I'm so glad," responded Mrs. Creighton. "Bring it over, and we'll see what it says."

THE slate was covered with fine writing, the minute characters, distinct as script etched on a copper plate, running from margin to margin, spaces between the lines so narrow as to be hardly recognizable.

For a moment we studied the calligraphy in puzzled silence; then:

"*Mort de ma vie,* we have triumphed over Death and Time, my friends!" de Grandin cried excitedly. "*Attendez, si'l vous plaît.*" Opening the slates before him like a book he read:

"Revered and awful judges of the world, ye awful ones who sit upon the parapets of hell, I answer guilty to the charge ye bring against me. Aye, Atoua, who now stands on the brink of deathless death, whose body waits the crushing stones of doom, whose spirit, robbed for ever of the hope of fleshly tegument, must wander in Amenti till the end of time has come, confesses that the fault was hers, and hers alone.

"Behold me, awesome judges of the living and the dead, am I not a woman, and a woman shaped for love? Are not my members beautiful to see, my lips like apricots and pomegranates, my eyes like milk and beryl, my breasts like ivory set with coral? Yea, mighty ones, I am a woman, and a woman formed for joy.

"Was it my fault or my volition that I was pledged to serve the great All-Mother, Isis, or ever I had left the shelter of my mother's flesh? Did I abjure the blissful agony of love and seek a life of sterile chastity, or was the promise spoken for me by another's lips?

"I gave all that a woman has to give, and gave it freely, knowing that the pains of death and after death the torment of the gods awaited me, nor do I deem the price too great to pay.

"Ye frown? Ye shake your dreadful heads upon which rest the crowns of Amun and of Kneph, of Seb and Tem, of Suti and Osiris' mighty self? Ye say that I speak sacrilege? Then hear me yet awhile: She who stands in chains before ye, shorn of reverence as a priestess of Great Mother Isis, shorn of all honor as a woman, tells ye these things to your teeth, knowing that ye can not do her greater hurt than that she stands already judged to undergo. Your reign and that of those ye serve draws near its end. A little while ye yet may strut and preen yourselves and mouth the judgments of your gods, but in the days that wait your very names shall be forgot, save when some stranger delves into your tombs and drags your violated bodies forth for men to make a show of. Aye, and the very gods ye serve shall be forgotten — they shall sink so low that none shall call their names, not even as a curse, and in their ruined temples none shall do them reverence, and no living thing be found, save only the white-bellied lizard and the fearful jackal.

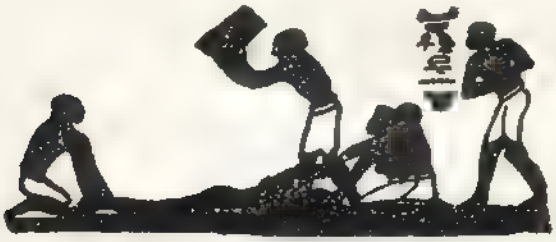
"And who shall do this thing? An offspring of the Hebrews! Yea, from the people ye despise a child shall spring, and great shall be His glory. He shall put down your gods beneath his feet and spoil them of all glory and respect; they shall become but shadow-gods of a forgotten past.

"My name ye've stricken from the roll of priestesses, no writing shall be graven on my tomb, and I shall be forgotten for all time by gods and men. So reads your judgment. I give ye, then, the lie. Upon a day far in the future strange men from a land across the sea shall open wide my tomb and take my body from it, nor shall

my flesh taste of corruption until those strangers look upon my face and see my broken bones, and seeing, wonder how I died. *And I shall tell them.* Yea, by Osiris' self I swear that though I have been dead for centuries, I shall relate the manner of my judgment and my death, and they shall know my name and weep for me, and on your heads they shall heap curses for this thing ye do to me.

"Pile now your stones of doom upon my breast, break my bones and still the fevered beating of my heart. I go to death, but not from out the memory of men as ye shall go. I have spoken."

Below the writing was a little scrawl of drawing, as crudely executed as a child's rough chalk-sketch on a wall; yet as we looked at it we seemed to see the outline of a woman held upon the ground by kneeling slaves while a man above her poised a heavy rock to crush her exposed breast and another stood in readiness to aid the executioner:



"Cordieu!" de Grandin exclaimed as we gazed upon the drawing. "I shall say she told the truth, my friends. She was a priestess of the goddess Isis, and as such was sworn to lifelong chastity, with awful death by torture as the penalty for violation of her vow. Undoubtlessly she loved not wisely, but too well, as women have been wont to love since time began, and upon discovery she was sentenced to the death decreed for those who did forget their obligations to the goddess. Her chest was broken in with stones, and without benefit of mummification her mutilated body was put in a casket void of any writing which might give a clue to her identity. Without a single invocation to the gods who held the fate of her poor spirit in their hands, they buried her. But did she triumph? Who says otherwise? We know her name, Atoua, we know the reason and the manner of her death. But those old priests who judged her and decreed her doom—who knows their names, yes, *parbleu,* who knows or cares a single, solitary damn where their vile mummies lie? They are assuredly gone into oblivion, while she—*tiens,* at least she is a personality to us, and we are very much alive."

"Excuse me, gentlemen, if you're quite finished with these relics, I'll take them, now," Professor Hodgson interrupted. "This little séance has been interesting, but you must admit nothing sufficiently authentic to be incorporated in our archives has been developed here. I fear we shall have to label these bones and ornaments as belonging to an unidentified body found by Doctor Larson at Naga-ed-dêr. Now, if you don't mind I shall get——"

"Get anywhere you wish, *Monsieur,* and get there quickly," de Grandin broke in furiously. "You have presided over relics of the dead so long your brain is clogged with mummy-dust. As for your heart—*mort d'un rat mort,* I do not think you have one!

"As for me," he added with a sudden smile, "I return at once to Doctor Trowbridge's. This poor young lady's tragic fate affects me deeply, and unless some urgent business interferes, I plan to drown my sorrow—*morbleu,* I shall do more. Within the hour I shall be most happily intoxicated!"

"A scream of horror died on Muir's lips as he was jerked into the blackness."

Spawn of the Shadows

By WILLIAM H. POPE

A startling story of a flight to the Moon, and weird perils among the ghastly creatures that inhabit it

CONDEMNED! I had felt certain of the verdict ever since the miserable travesty of a trial before the Council, but the blaring voice of the loud-speaker from the grating in the upper corner of my cell blasted the shred of hope which lingers desperately in every breast even after reason has bowed to the inevitable.

"International Council decides fate of leader of incipient rebellion of Colonies. Nathan Woodruff, scientist and arch-

plotter, and Garfield Draughon, his helper and co-conspirator, will die under the Flame in the Public Square of Colony 7 tomorrow morning at nine o'clock. Be present and see the traitors die!"

Ironic invitation! Of course I'd be there — as one of the principal actors. All over the world the news was being spread by the mechanical voices from the Public Information Bureau in the Council Building, and in our home colony, 7, there would be white faces, whispers, and not a few tears. Already I could see the platform raised above the heads of the milling throng, could see the black metal of the flame-projector above, its thin-slitted, fan-shaped muzzle suspended between the slim metal columns with Black George, the executioner, standing by, his finger on the trigger mechanism, a malevolent grin on his evil countenance. I shivered involuntarily.

Woodruff and I were to go the same route taken by the leaders of the unsuccessful revolt in Colony 3 a few months ago. Together we had watched Black George touch that deadly lever a score of times, and with each pressure a sheet of electronic flame had sheared a head from its supporting neck more cleanly than ever did the guillotine of three centuries before. Horror-filled, but with hate for our oppressors more deeply ingrained than ever, we had gone back to our quiet work of organization. This next attempt must not fail. The progress of the world itself depended upon its success.

But it had failed, nipped in the bud, so to speak, by a cursed traitor in our own ranks. Tomorrow Woodruff and I would die, and organized crime would leer mockingly at the puny effort to dethrone it.

I shuddered. No man can face such a death without a qualm, but I could have climbed the metal steps to the execution platform with a fortitude born of pleasure could I have held the treacherous neck of Dured Akridge on a line with my own.

The pale, thin face of the rotten-souled traitor flitted before my mind, maddeningly out of reach of my avenging fingers. Because of him the only man on earth able to lead the despairing colonies out of their virtual enslavement would die on the scaffold in the morning, with me powerless to do aught but pace the smooth floor of my cell like a trapped animal. I stared at the smooth green glass about me that held its prisoners more jealously than did the stone and steel of the old penitentiaries. Floor, walls, ceiling of opaque glass, the monotony broken only by the ventilator grating in an upper corner and the metallic mouth of the loud-speaker in the opposite angle. Only faint, parallel lines marked the position of the door, operated only from the warden's office.

No use to fume. I dropped hopelessly on the inflated mattress. Never had there been an escape from the great glass prison, and never would there be one without outside connivance, thanks to the devilish ingenuity of that cursed De Berrie, the renegade scientist who had given his brilliant genius to organized crime back in 1980, after the collapse of the people's moral fiber. And the only man feared by the International Council was safely sealed in the next cell to mine!

"Garfield Draughon! Report to warden's office!"

The order came metallically through the speaker from the prison tube. The door panel slid noiselessly down into the wall on its groove-and-flange joints. I passed through into the glass corridor.

THE corridor, a tier of cells on either side, narrowed as it approached the office, its other terminal stopping at the rear of the semicircular building. Nine

other corridors, like the spokes in an old-fashioned wheel, had their only outlet in the office, where the warden on duty sat before a bank of controls and attended single-handed to the whole institution.

The office panel slid down. I entered the circular room and stopped, stiffening. The warden was Calvin Muir, the renegade De Berrie's right-hand man. He sat behind a horseshoe desk, a flame-pistol convenient to his hand, and eyed me speculatively. Then he glanced at the clock glowing in the glass wall and sprang to his feet.

"I'm to bring you to the Council Building at once," he said crisply. "Walk ahead of me, and at the first quick motion you'll lose an arm or a leg. March!"

He pressed a button, and the big exit panel slid down. I went gingerly down the broad steps and into the twilight of the courtyard.

"Straight ahead to the tube line," he directed, and I obeyed, my hands at my side. There was no enclosing wall; the streets about the prison were empty, being reserved for officials only, but I knew that at the first suspicious move I would be crippled before I had fairly started. Later, maybe. My heart leaped.

We dipped in under the public tube line and emerged beside the official groove. The prison rocket tube rested in the shining metal groove and Muir ordered me inside. He entered behind me, motioned me forward and took the controls in the rear. With a jerk we shot forward.

The sudden turn of events had sent a foolish hope swirling in my head. Had the Council relented? Or unearthed evidence in our favor? Reason scorned the thought. The Council never relented; its decree was as final as death itself, and there was no evidence to discover that was not incriminating. The traitor, Akridge, had done his dirty work only too well. No, there was something else in the wind which I would learn in due time, but it would be wise to steel myself against any hope of mercy.

The expansion brakes brought us to a halt before the private gateway to the Council Building, a massive pile of concrete, glass and steel. Muir, motioning me out, followed at my heels and directed me through a maze of corridors into a pneumatic shuttle which took us swiftly a quarter-mile above the ground floor and deposited us in a circular room in the tower. To the left a door swung open and we marched into a richly furnished room, not, I observed, the room in which I had been sentenced.

In a chair almost swallowing him sat a small, plump man whom I instantly recognized as Joroon De Berrie, the Council's sub-chief and advisor. Small, pointed mustaches protruded needle-like from his upper lip, and his black eyes were so intensely piercing they seemed to emit beams of deadly power. Muir snapped to attention, but I stood stolidly before this hated co-ruler of the earth.

He eyed me with hypnotic intensity. Suddenly he sprang to his feet.

"Be seated," he commanded, waving me to a chair. Then he planted himself before me, his short legs spread wide, his eyes streaming force.

"Tomorrow morning you die!" he barked. "Do you wish to live?"

"Who doesn't?" I countered.

"The decree of the Council is absolute —as a rule," he stated harshly. "But I, De Berrie, control the Council. If I say the word you live. Understand?"

I nodded. This preliminary was leading to something and I must be on my guard. What did he want, information?

"I can give you life, position, wealth." He ticked them off on his thick fingers,

lancing me with his fiery eyes. "Or I can give you the Flame. There is a price, of course. The life of a rebel means not that much to me!" He snapped a finger contemptuously.

I shrugged. "You seem to know me better than I know myself. I have no money—the tax assessments keep me stripped. And," I continued hotly, "if that traitor, Akridge, left anything about the uprising untold it will stay that way for ever, as far as I'm concerned."

De Berrie shook his head impatiently.

"The rebellion is out—like that. I wish to hear no more of it. But in mentioning your poverty you touched the thing I have in mind. How does Colony 7 pay its tax of a quarter-million semi-annually?"

I drew a quick breath. So that was it! Woodruff had foreseen the contingency months ago:

"Ever since organized crime overthrew world governments, Draughon, because of foolish sentimentalism on the part of society and the gradual breakdown of the public moral fiber, they have been jealous and fearful of the remnants of the old so-called aristocracy. Hence their segregation into colonies. And as society used to try to tax the vice districts out of existence, so is organized crime attempting to discourage those who scorn their distorted views. Sooner or later they will wonder where Colony 7 gets its quarter-million half-payment from two thousand people. De Berrie's only god is gold! Pray the time does not come until we are ready to act."

The time had come and we were not ready.

De Berrie stamped his foot on the thick rug.

"Answer!" he rasped. "And don't lie. I know much."

He knew all that Akridge knew, of course. But how much had the traitor found out? I answered evasively.

"Woodruff has paid the last two years' taxes from his personal resources. And when you kill him that much of your income is stopped."

"What resources? Quick! As a physicist?" The sneer was pointed.

"Certainly not. The International Council confiscated his profitable discoveries. You yourself stole his Universal Mechanical Voice."

It was a foolish thrust. A flame-pistol leaped into his hand and he took deliberate aim at my right arm.

"Answer direct," he shouted, "or you'll go under the Flame a cripple!"

I was mad. Had there been the slightest chance of killing him I would have sprung for his throat. But there wasn't, not with the two of them armed and alert. Suddenly it dawned on me—the reason for my summons. Unwittingly, Akridge had done me a favor.

"The gold comes from a deposit we discovered on the moon two years ago." My heart thumped as I watched for the effect of this statement. But my hunch was right. De Berrie pocketed his weapon and smiled with satisfaction.

"Good. You are speaking truth. De Berrie will not forget. And the ship in which you make these trips to the moon, eh? You will pilot it in return for your life?"

"And that of Professor Woodruff."

But De Berrie shook his head emphatically. "What you ask is impossible. Not even De Berrie could save the instigator of the rebellion. Nor would he. You are of no consequence; Woodruff, yes. Besides, it would take me no great time to operate this ship myself, no? De Berrie is not a fool, he is a scientist, the greatest!"

I saw the force of his reasoning. Experimentation would teach him the control of the W-R without my help, and I was necessary to him only because I promised quick gratification of his greed for the yellow metal. Of course, he must have the ship first, but the fact that Akridge knew of it at all indicated that he might have a hazy idea of its hiding-place, jealously though we had guarded the secret.

But I risked one more delay.

"What guarantee have I that you will stick to your bargain after I have done my part?"

"Guarantee!" he shrieked in a passion of impatience. "You have my word—the word of De Berrie——"

"Which is not worth a copper," I interrupted.

He turned on me in a fury, and for a moment I thought I had gone too far; for his flame-pistol leaped into my face and his finger trembled on the trigger.

"You may never find the ship," I reminded him.

He knew it. He dropped the pistol to his pocket and his piercing eyes flashed with baffled rage. Suddenly he reached into an inner pocket and drew forth a small emblem, fan-shaped, of blood-red gold—the Sign of the Flame, a talisman possessed only by favorites and agents of the Council, and as potent as a modern Aladdin's lamp. He thrust it at me with a cunning leer.

"Here—you do not trust De Berrie, but he gives you proof of his sincerity. With this talisman you could free even your friend Woodruff, no? To say nothing of having power, wealth——"

His words trailed off into a shout of laughter. In his colossal conceit and security he was baiting me—offering me the one chance in a million——

And warning me what to expect!

The trip through the stratosphere in De Berrie's private ship from the Council Building stage in Washington to the Virginia mountains where Colony 7 was isolated from the teeming life of the coast took but a few minutes. In the cabin with us, his shifty eyes refusing to meet mine, was the arch-traitor, Dured Akridge, brought along, no doubt, to check up on me. Muir also accompanied us, ordering a relief to take his place in the prison for the night.

With the aid of its floodlight the plane settled lightly in an open space outside the colony boundary. Under the hawk-like eyes of Muir and De Berrie, I crawled out of the ship and looked longingly toward the little city where we had planned and wrought so hard — and so fruitlessly. Little had I dreamed then that I would soon be leading the enemy to the unmasking of our most precious secret — the space-ship, which was to play such a prominent part in our dreams of freedom.

I led the party to the sheer face of a cliff overhung by the wooded brow of a mountain. De Berrie held a light-tube while I located the control switch in its hidden crevice and the great rock-veneered door slid back in its groove. A second switch inside the door illuminated the interior of the huge cavern, part natural, part excavated by faithful hands—the hangar for the W-R, and Professor Woodruff's secret laboratory.

De Berrie drew a quick breath of interest at sight of the apparatus so painstakingly collected. But he tore himself away from the more familiar appliances and gave his attention to the gleaming metallic hull of the space-ship. This, I knew, was of especial interest to him, owing to the fact that one of his own invention had crashed back to earth with disastrous results only a year before, when its rocket motive power had failed only a

hundred miles or so up. Woodruff had used beam propulsion, developed from his experiments with cosmic rays.

I entered the open airlock, followed closely by Muir with his ever ready pistol. De Berrie came last. Then I closed the outer door, automatically opening the inner panel which gave access to the comfortable cabin. De Berrie motioned me to the controls, taking a seat beside me. His intention was to occupy my seat on the return trip, I reflected grimly. I opened the bakelite power dial, pulled down the starting-lever which simultaneously released the electro-magnetic gravity-repulsion rays, and we floated silently out of the cavern and into the night.

Up, up we soared until I saw in the moonlight on the vision mirror the gray line of the Atlantic Ocean. Up, until the altimeter needle in the pressure gage showed that we were nearly out of the atmosphere. Then I poised the ship while I adjusted the spectroscope-selector to the moon's spectrum. The bow tilted gently and swung about. I turned the power dial until the speed indicator hovered at a point a fiftieth the speed of light. De Berrie, scientist that he was, asked but few questions. Then he applied himself to the radio vision mirror on the instrument board.

The mirror filled swiftly with moon surface. Mountains and craters, even the larger rock masses, began to show in detail. I cut off the propulsion beams and reversed the electro-magnetic field of the gravity motors. We were, in effect, hurtling forward with the brakes set. I studied the mirror intently, nursing the ship toward the sharp spire of a mountain which I had named Mount Woodruff in honor of the professor. At sight of the landmark a vague plan began to form in my mind, and I acted on the hunch by guiding the craft to a stopping-place some distance beyond our usual landing-point. We settled on the moon with a slight jar. I turned to De Berrie.

"This peak, Mount Woodruff, is our stopping-point. But the professor has always been the pilot, and I can not tell for certain whether we stopped on the right side of it until we get out."

De Berrie accepted the explanation in excellent good humor.

"De Berrie is always reasonable," he said graciously. "Besides, you have all to gain by playing fair, eh? You think De Berrie would leave you on the dead planet to perish. But no! Draughon could not foment rebellion, but Woodruff, ah! He is the man whom the Council fears. With him at large—but he is safe in the great glass house!"

He laughed. I gritted my teeth helplessly and began laying out the spacesuits and pointed out the radio equipment for use on the airless planet. But I made no mention of the little dial on each suit whose magnetic needle always pointed toward the W-R. My plan was growing steadily. One at a time we emerged from the air-lock into the blinding glare of the unrefracted sunlight.

I LOOKED anxiously about me for a familiar landmark and breathed easier. So far, so good. To my left and above me loomed the naked, craggy eminence of the professor's peak, easily recognizable by the deep fissure which split its sheer eastern face as though it had been cloven with a knife. The treasure deposit, I now knew, lay about a mile around the base of the mountain to the right, and to reach it we would have to pass before the mouth of the great fissure and through the shadow cone of the ancient volcano, a shadow as black as a cauldron of pitch.

De Berrie's voice sounded loudly in my helmet.

"Do you know your position? Remember, no trickery!"

"I should have landed more to the right," I told him apologetically. "The deposit lies some distance ahead. Shall we go on?"

I hoped desperately that my voice gave him no inkling of how much depended on his decision. Despite his reassuring words I had not missed the significant look and gesture he had given Muir as we left the Council Building: my usefulness would be over when I showed them the gold, and if he chose to cover the gap I'd purposely made in the W-R I was lost. But if we walked——

He took one step and the unfamiliar buoyancy of his body due to the lessened gravitation decided the issue. He motioned me in front.

I smiled grimly as we struck out with easy strides across the sere, parched face of the dead planet. Little good Muir's ever-present pistol would do him if my scheme carried! De Berrie's conceit and his greed for gold and power would wither swiftly in the vast silence of the lifeless desert. And Akridge? His yellow soul would perish miserably from very cowardice when he realized his plight!

But the plan I had formed was desperate, almost suicidal; yet it offered a remote chance of escape, while if I once reached the little crater with its wealth of raw gold my doom was certain, and with it, Woodruff's. And with Woodruff's, chaos for the helpless colonies. I picked the way through the motionless dust formed by the terrific extremes of temperature, past scattered, sharp-edged boulders almost to the edge of the shadow cone itself, when De Berrie's exclamation checked me.

"God, what shadows! No air, no diffusion of the light rays. Not like earth —eh?—with its atmospheric motes that reflect the beam and make the shadows less frightening! We skirt this inky wall, Draughon. I have no desire to step blindly into an abyss like the crevasse there."

He pointed to a split in the parched crust of the dead satellite, a crack several feet wide, its bottom lost in unfathomable darkness. We could see its irregular line extending on ahead of us to the right, beginning in the curving rim of a crater towering hundreds of feet high, while the near end lost itself somewhere in the shadow cone of the peak which jutted across the path I had taken.

Checkmate! In my eagerness to put my scheme into effect I had plunged ahead without thinking. De Berrie was no simpleton to walk blindly into a trap. I veered away from the black veil, dodging the scattered fragments of stone, blown out of the great crater ages ago, skirting the base of a precipitous, jagged mass of rock of a crystalline quartz which reflected the sun rays in a blinding dazzle. Above, the sun was poised like a great yellow fireball against a curtain of black velvet, and my eyes rested a moment longingly on the huge, beautiful crescent that was earth.

Marching with great, effortless strides that covered the flinty ground astonishingly fast, we came to the fissure, which was at least fifteen feet wide. I leaped it easily, as did Muir and De Berrie. Akridge held back, coward-like, but made the ridiculously easy spring at De Berrie's impatient command. I was relieved, for I wanted the traitor with us, not skulking about the flyer.

BEYOND the crevasse Fate gave me the the break I was hoping for. A steep, sheer crater rim jutted into our line of march, forcing us to make a long detour or walk within a few feet of the shadow line. I chose the latter way, momentarily

expecting De Berrie to halt me, but he seemed oblivious to the move and I quietly loosened the light-tube in its leather socket at my waist.

Briefly, my plan was to dart into the protection of the impenetrable shadow and make a break back for the W-R. Earth strength plus moon gravity would give me speed, and the surprize would give the necessary seconds for a safe start. With my light-tube I should be able to avoid a plunge into a crevasse, and their flame-pistols would be useless with no visible target. The dangerous part of the scheme was the first few moments of flight, which I must make blind; for the light-tube would give me away to my pursuers and I must risk plunging into one of the innumerable cracks which split the planet's crust at frequent intervals. After the first hundred yards I would be safe, for I doubted the tube's ability to show light even that far in the almost palpable blackness.

But the chance had to be taken; it at least offered a sporting risk, and death was death whatever the form. We approached the point, my muscles tensed, and I whirled and sprang into the enveloping shadow.

The transition was as abrupt and startling as a plunge into a pool of ink. Instantly I lost all sense of direction. My helmet roared with a shout of surprize from De Berrie and Muir. I leaped ahead blindly and popped into the glaring light in front of Dured Akridge, paralyzed in his tracks, his face white behind his helmet. For an instant I was tempted to make a dash through the sunlight, but a flashing thought showed the hazard of discovery and the menace of the pistols; so I sprang back into the blackness.

A sudden scream of fear shrilling in my helmet halted me; not a moment too soon, else I had rammed full into De Berrie. A light-tube flashed its sudden luminance not ten feet away and a horrible sight etched itself into my brain.

Muir was struggling in the grip of a nightmarish monster that could well have come from the slime-pits of hell. Full in the light cone from the tube held by the astounded De Berrie, Muir battled with his attacker. His throaty gasps sounded clearly over the radio. Of normal size was Muir, but the creature topped him by a head. Its form was that of man, but its body was covered like a fish's with overlapping green scales, and the fingers, inexorably gripping Muir's body, ended in short, stubby claws that could have torn the hapless man to shreds except for the protecting metallic suit. The monster's head was rounded, scaled, and seemed neckless, and the eye-sockets were hollow pits. As the light had flashed on them I somehow gained the impression that the thing was horned, but a clearer view showed no indication of it.

A bubbling scream of horror died on Muir's lips as he was jerked into the blackness. De Berrie's shout shrilled up into a shriek of dismay; the light cone wavered, was abruptly extinguished. A hollow moan echoed in my helmet.

De Berrie, too, was gone!

Consternation seized me. I fled wildly in the direction I thought lay the sunlight I had just left, frantic to escape the unknown terrors lurking in a shadow suddenly become more menacing than any peril I had ever faced. The thought that my enemies had been wiped from my path was smothered in fear of the monsters that laired in the shadows cast by the frowning crags of the dead planet.

Panic seized me. A dozen great leaps found me still in the shadow. I was running in a circle, hopelessly lost. The direction dial on my suit! I reached for the light-tube, just as powerful hands clamped

about my waist and flung me heavily to the iron-hard ground. The shock knocked me unconscious.

I FELT myself being dragged roughly along over a fairly smooth surface, like rock. A voice was dinning into my ears.

"Muir! Draughon! Akridge! Are you dead, eh? Answer me!"

It was De Berrie, and close, to judge by the volume of sound. I answered. It was comforting to know that I was not alone with the horror, even if De Berrie was an enemy.

"We are in a corridor of stone," came the voice, "and the brute who has you is treading on my heels. If you are able we will stop and fight, no? Speak quickly."

It seemed futile, but desperation will force a man to many foolish things. I flung myself to my feet, wrenching loose from the clawed fingers.

"Now!" I screamed, and grappled with the subman with the fury of despair.

Instantly there was silent turmoil in the narrow gallery.

With every ounce of a strength six times greater than normal I slugged at the scaly body of the nightmarish brute that grappled me, and felt my fist, protected by the metallic gloves, grow numb with the impact. It was like striking the hide of a crocodile. The brute ignored the blow and sought to envelop my body in its scaly, iron-strong arms. I knew, though I could neither see nor hear, that its claws were seeking a vulnerable spot in my suit. De Berrie's laboring gasps mingled with my own sounded loud in my ears. Swiftly I searched for what passed for the creature's face; if I could dig my mailed fingers into those deep eye-sockets! But my groping hand clutched instead a rubbery protuberance extending from the forehead. I gripped the yielding projection tightly in an effort to twist it from the skull. But the advantage was short-lived. The monster flung me to the rock floor of the gallery with a force that shook my bones and threatened the thick glass of my helmet face. Immediately it dropped on my body and I lost hope. One smash on the helmet with that horny hand would be the finish. But the end was not yet.

Without warning the dense blackness melted swiftly before a soft flaming glow that seemed to come from the wall behind the moon-thing—a wall which the reddish light showed to be cracked and fissured like the surface of the tortured planet. Instantly I saw the creature draw away from me, saw him hideously outlined for a moment against the lambent glow like a devil from hell; then he vanished into the gloom of the corridor.

I struggled erect, and stumbled over De Berrie. He groaned and muttered, clutching me for support as he got painfully to his feet.

"God!" he said hoarsely. "What was it, Draughon—beast, reptile, or devil?"

I shook my head, forgetting that he couldn't see the gesture. The mysterious red glow waned, brightened, then died out. We stood free in the Stygian blackness.

"I don't know, but it handled me like a baby. But that strange red light seemed to scare the thing away. What was it?"

"Another devil, eh? But it rescued us. More spawn of these accursed shadows. But we are in its debt, no?"

Happily we were in ignorance of the ghastly payment yet to be made for that timely deliverance. I thought only of the blessed sunlight somewhere outside this devilish gallery of gloom.

"Which way leads out? I lost all sense of direction."

"You strike the nub of the situation, Draughon. I, myself was whirled about so madly in the embrace of that fiend that

I have no notion of how to proceed. Shall we try this way? It is as good as any, no?"

It was. In single file we started down the narrow corridor, each thankful for the other's presence; a tacit truce for the time being binding us together against the common cause of deadly peril.

De Berrie was talkative.

"We can talk with safety, eh, Draughon? The mightiest crash could make no noise on this accursed planet. Poor Muir! He was a good lieutenant. It is your fault, Draughon, for leaping into that hellish shadow. But we will forget that, until we see, eh?"

I ignored the implied threat.

"Poor Draughon!" the cheerful rascal chuckled. "He thought to escape and use the little emblem to free his compatriot, no? The discovery of Professor Woodruff, kept so secret, which would reduce the Council to terms and liberate the colonies from their oppression, will be lost under the Flame in the morning, despite Draughon's so heroic effort, alas!" He chuckled again. "We shall not escape. I feel it."

I started at his knowledge of our plans. Gad, how much had Akridge learned? All, evidently. However, the cause was lost anyway. As De Berrie so cheerfully admitted, escape was very remote. Woodruff himself, the very key to the colonies' plans, was in no more dangerous straits than ourselves. We were somewhere in the bowels of a mountain that reared its forbidding crags above the arid, desolate face of a long-dead world, surrounded, probably, by weird unknown and unfamiliar enemies against whom we had no means of defense except our empty hands, which had so far seemed wofully inadequate. De Berrie had lost his weapon: his light-tube and mine had fallen somewhere in that awful shadow. At any moment we might drop soundlessly into some bottomless fissure yawning unseen across our path. Or we might plunge full tilt into some horrible denizen of this eldritch cavern. Spawn of the shadows, De Berrie had aptly named them.

We marched stolidly on, silent now, shunted this way and that by the twisting walls of the corridor. Presently we rounded a sharp turn and De Berrie halted so abruptly that I bumped into him.

"Ahead of us, Draughon. Look! Have my eyes gone mad in this tomb-like shaft, or is this hellish darkness thinning?"

My eyes caught the difference as he spoke. It was not actual light, but rather a dilution of the darkness, as milk may lighten the shade of ink. Encouraged, we hurried on. The luminance became more pronounced, like moonlight on earth diffused by fog.

De Berrie stopped short with an exclamation of dismay.

"The pit! The pit of hell itself! We have blundered into a nest of the accursed devils!"

I pressed close and looked over De Berrie's shoulder.

Before us opened a vast subterranean chamber, roughly round, whose sloping, jagged walls and domed roof emitted a ghostly, bluish radiance that fairly illuminated the interior and the weird activity going on in the center of the chamber.

A horde of the submen were grouped in a semicircle about a bare place in the middle of which was a smooth flat stone like an altar. On this pedestal stood one of the creatures, gesticulating with his taloned hands much like a political speaker on earth. I stared at him in horrified fascination.

The detailed view was even more repulsive than the hasty glance I had got during Muir's fight with one of the brutes, especially the face. Evolution, perhaps,

had done away with ears and nostrils; whether vestigial gill-slits were left I could not see at that distance, but a small mouth was evidenced by a thin line of lips. But the eyes! My first impression of horns was now confirmed; only the protuberances were tipped with bulging orbs—eyes that were telescoped at will according to the amount of light available. It was an eye, then, that I had wrenched in the corridor, incurring swift reprisal.

And the extended orbs of the creature on the altar were emitting intermittent flashes of reddish light, so regularly spaced and definite in briefness or duration they could mean only one thing—speech, the only communication possible in a soundless world.

"A priest!" De Berrie whispered excitedly. "He is harranguing his audience, exhorting them. That group behind the altar, eh? And that blurred bundle on the ground? It looks—it is! It is Muir! They have brought him here to the council chamber!"

De Berrie's voice had risen to a shriek, startling me despite the knowledge that the submen could not hear. But the words did carry, for a voice weak but plainly audible over the radio sounded in my ears. Muir's.

"Have they got the rest of you? What *are* they, De Berrie, brutes or humans?"

De Berrie explained how we came to the cavern and asked a few questions.

"No; they didn't hurt me—the spacesuit was protection. But I think they're saving me for a sacrifice. I judge the brute on the altar to be a priest. They seem to take orders from him. Have you any weapons?"

"No. My pistol was lost in the struggle. And you, eh?"

"Nothing. And the devils are strong. It was that damned Draughon that led us into the trap! I'm gone, De Berrie, but by God, I want you to make Draughon pay for his treachery!"

This was a complication I hadn't foreseen. I looked at De Berrie and saw him regarding me speculatively through the glass of his helmet. Then he turned away, but the glance put me on my guard. The truce was off. Muir's passionate words had fired anew the old hate which our mutual danger had for the moment side-tracked. Nor was I bothered by Muir's charge of treachery, for I had only anticipated their own treachery.

Fresh activity in the chamber switched our minds to other channels. At a motion from the priest, one of the creatures began climbing a rude ledge which spiraled the walls at a steep pitch until it reached the center of the dome, using his taloned fingers and toes to good advantage. I back-trailed the ledge and discovered that it circled down the wall to the corridor beside us, where it terminated a few feet from the floor. A number of faintly luminous objects of the size and shape of a coconut caught my eye. A line of them extended along the ledge against the wall as far as I could see. Touching one I found it warm and slightly yielding, like rubber.

De Berrie, observing, picked one up and examined it with the curiosity of a scientist. I heard him mutter:

"Phosphorescent, eh, like the walls. It could be—ah, it is, undoubtedly! An egg. The brutes are oviparous and the cavern is a huge incubator."

He picked up one of the ovoids and held it in his hand.

THE exhorter on the pedestal finished his discourse. A storm of silent applause swept the horde as they vigorously raised and lowered their scaly arms in excited approval. The priest turned his back to them and lifted his arms in an

attitude of supplication, his head tilted back, his repulsive eyes concentrated on the dome, where the climber sat on the ledge staring intently downward.

The silent cavern seemed charged with eery vibrations. I was minded to turn and flee down the corridor while there was yet time, but a terrible fascination kept me spellbound. De Berrie was intent on the tableau.

The watcher on the ledge had moved, stood upright. His taloned hands moved swiftly over the wall behind him and above his head, and a thin pencil of light appeared, dropping slowly like a tiny stream of water poured from a height. The ray descended until it struck full upon the priest on the altar, still in his posture of supplication. Rapidly now the beam swelled until it became a round column of blue radiance streaming down from the lofty dome and bathing the priest in a weird cascade of ghostly fog. It streamed over his armored body, enveloping him like an impalpable, dully shimmering robe whose train overspread the stone like a sheet of liquid, overflowing at last into the depths below the cavern floor, apparently through a seam in the rock supporting the altar. It purled and rippled like a thick, sirupy fluid, though in substance it seamed like smoke.

De Berrie, tremendously excited, clutched my arm.

"God!" he ejaculated. "Is it gas, liquid, or a radio-active emanation, eh? If I but had a flask of it! Not even in the laboratory have I, De Berrie, seen such stuff. Hist! They take Muir!"

The guards about Muir had seized him, dragging him erect.

"He resists—he fights!" De Berrie was nearly frantic. "They drag him to the altar—he holds back. Muir is a fighter, a grand fighter! He grapples the guards! Curse them, their armor is like that of the crocodile; he can not hurt them. It is the end. Ah!"

The guards, assisted by some of the horde, picked Muir up and bore him to the altar. They halted while the priest stepped from the stone, the phosphorescence clinging to his body so that he glowed incandescently, like a fiend stepping from the fires of hell.

"They throw Muir into the emanation!" shrieked De Berrie. A yell from Muir was clipped oddly short as though the radio had collapsed beneath the ray. "He must feel its hellish influence through the space-suit. That yell! Now he bounds from the accursed altar and charges his tormenters. Hell's furies! Why did I lose my pistol?"

I was keyed up like the excitable scientist, but the scene was nearly done. Muir struggled gamely, but hopelessly. De Berrie, in his insane eagerness to see it all, clambered awkwardly upon the ledge. Four of the huge brutes picked Muir up and spread-eagled him forcibly upon the altar for a few seconds that must have been agonizing, for even the giant strength of the submen was shaken by his terrific struggles.

Then he stilled, lay motionless in the steady flow of the ghastly beam.

"He melts—he melts! He is dissolving like metal in the acid. God, what power the accursed ray has! Do you see, Draughon? Do you observe?"

I swore silently. De Berrie was more interested in the tragedy from a scientific standpoint than in the horrible death suffered by his lieutenant. For Muir was gone, dissolved under the awful beam like a tab of butter. For a bit the metal of his space-suit lingered in a little shapeless heap; then it, too, disappeared.

Calamity exploded before us like a bomb.

De Berrie, unable to keep still, in some

way knocked one of the rubbery ovoids off the shelf. Like an animate telltale it bounced slightly on the hard floor, then rolled over the smooth, sloping surface straight toward the group about the altar.

The keen eyes of the priest saw it first. Consternation held me in a vise while his hideous eyes swiftly traced the ovoid's back trail and rested full upon us for a split second. Then the orbs turned to the multitude, brief flashes sparked a command and with one accord the mass rushed toward us.

Before my dull wits could function, De Berrie flung himself from the shelf, gave me a trip and a push that sent me sprawling, and dashed away. I sprang to my feet full in the path of the onrushing reptilian horde. It was too late to run. I looked desperately about for a rock fragment. But the smooth floor was bare of even the smallest splinter. With the instinctive gesture of a dying man I reached back to the ledge, grasped one of the rubbery eggs and with a cry of utter futility hurled it full into the face of the priest, who was leading the rush.

It burst in a phosphorescent mush. The brutes paused, milled in confusion, and I fled down the corridor on the wings of fear.

I tore through the blackness with frantic speed. Nerves twitched in ghastly expectation of taloned hands from the darkness clutching my flying body. Streams of cold sweat coursed down my back, sweat born of a nightmare of fear; a fear heightened by the knowledge that there could be no sound of pursuit, no warning of danger—until death struck from the darkness.

Suddenly a shout rang in my ears, the shout of a human being in dire distress, a shout torn from stricken lungs at the onslaught of desperate peril. I slowed up, rounding a corner, and crashed into the opposite wall, only my extended arm saving the glass in my helmet from destruction. The collision saved me from plunging headlong into the acme of the horrors produced by this cavern of dread.

De Berrie was fast in the clutches of a gigantic scorpion!

THE darkness in the corridor glowed as if heated in a forge, the luminance flowing from the huge, bulging eyes of the insect. The scorpion's palpi, equipped with two-foot, scissor-like claws embraced the scientist like a pair of giant shears; the thin metal of his space-suit was giving visibly under the terrific pressure. But despite the peril of a punctured suit, De Berrie was making no effort to dislodge the claws. Every ounce of power was concentrated on keeping that deadly, upcurved tail from plunging its great barb into his body.

My own danger was forgotten in a rush of horror. This, then, was the thing that had frightened away the submen with its sinister glow. But the irony of that rescue was lost in terrified fascination. Slowly, irresistibly, the armored segments of the great tail lifted the murderous horn in an arc that would plunge the poisonous barb into De Berrie's shoulder. Over the radio came the short gasps, the stertorous breathing of the man as he strove with mighty effort to prevent completion of the fatal arc, his hands gripping the tail with the courage of despair.

I forgot his treachery in tripping me in the face of the horde of submen; forgot even that he was De Berrie, hated subchief of the dreaded Council, and searched the floor of the corridor for a bit of stone. But the floor was barren of weapons, save for the ovoid which De Berrie had taken from the cavern chamber and dropped when attacked by the scorpion. I seized it, drew back my arm, then saw the futility of interference. My arm lowered.

Higher rose the mighty armored segments of the tail; higher, until De Berrie's pudgy figure was stretched as far as the palpi's claws would permit. Still the tail arched as resistlessly as the boom of a derrick.

With a sobbing gasp of despair De Berrie let go. The pointed barb flashed dully in the glow of the monster's eyes as it sped through its arc and sank into the victim's shoulder, piercing the space-suit as if it were soft tin.

De Berrie collapsed.

I shook with an ague of horror. The gigantic arachnid withdrew its bloody barb and turned its glowing eyes on me.

I sprang into the shadow, forgetting the menace behind under the threat of death ahead. But the creature drew back, seemingly satisfied for the time being, and began to back into a crevice, dragging the body of De Berrie with it. For awhile I waited. The lambent glow dimmed, then disappeared, and the shadows blotted out the scene of the tragedy.

I sprang forward, fleeing the place as though a thousand devils pursued.

INTO the sunshine I raced, stumbled and fell headlong, blinded by the glare. I studied the direction dial on the suit and followed its course until I came to the edge of the crevasse. Beyond was the jagged pile of quartz, flaming in the sun like a beacon of hope. A little farther on the metallic hull of the W-R glinted warm welcome. I crawled through the air-lock and into the cabin, dropping exhausted before the instrument panel.

Muir gone. De Berrie gone. Akridge? I had not seen him since I had so foolishly popped back into the shadow. Gone, too, no doubt. At any rate, I was free!

The fact stimulated me. I threw off the lethargy which had come over me as my taut nerves relaxed. I got out of the space-suit swiftly, almost stepping on the weird egg which I had unconsciously brought to the ship and dropped on the floor. There was much to be done yet, and destiny had intervened in my behalf.

I threw the switch, and the generators purred softly, charging the hull plates with gravity-repelling energy. The ship wavered, as weightless as a mote; only the motor-generated gravity field in the floor, insulated from the hull, enabled me to sit upright. I tuned in the selectroscope on earth, opened the power dial a few notches, and the propulsion beams shot us into space.

I looked at my watch and was amazed to find that only a little over three hours had elapsed since we left earth. I felt in my pocket for the emblem De Berrie had given me out of his confidence that I would be unable to use it. The chance in a million had hit! If the luck just held until I could get Woodruff clear of the prison, it would be the beginning of the end for the crime organizations that controlled the world.

But the issue was still in the balance. One slip could bring disaster.

The radio-vision mirror was filled with the earth, brilliant with moon reflection. I shut off the power and reversed the gravitational field, and we slid into the stratosphere at little more than a thousand miles an hour. Through the telescope I caught the Florida peninsula and swung the bow about to follow the Atlantic coastline, clearly marked by the terrific beacons.

In a few minutes the detector caught the high frequency waves from the air-lane signal tower at Washington, the needle swinging to the identification pole on the illuminated dial. I swung inland, and ten minutes later dropped the W-R in the courtyard of the great prison.

The delicate part of my job was before

me, and I knew there were no weapons in the flyer. My success depended entirely on the potency of the little emblem. But when my eye fell on the ovoid on the floor a thought struck me. It had saved my life once, or another one had, and it might come in handy again. I stooped and picked it up, slipping it into a handy pocket.

The thing was hot, almost uncomfortably so. Wondering about it, I passed out of the air-lock and crossed the courtyard to the prison steps. At the speaking-tube I paused.

"Open. I have a message from De Berrie."

The great portal slid down and I walked into the circular office.

The deputy warden swung about, stiffening as he recognized me. His hand shot to a flame-pistol and I flashed the official emblem before his suspicious eyes.

He acknowledged the symbol with a salute, but he was far from satisfied. "What is it?" he asked.

"De Berrie wishes to interview Professor Woodruff immediately. He and Muir are without."

So they were—in a sense.

"Why did not Muir come in person? You yourself are a prisoner."

"And the fact that I'm free and hold this emblem of authority should convince you," I retorted sharply. "However, it makes no difference. I will call De Berrie." And I stepped toward the door.

A voice screamed through the speaking-tube:

"He's killed Muir and De Berrie! Hold him while I get help!"

Akridge! Instantly I realized what had happened. Coward-like, he had fled at the first sign of trouble, stowed himself away on the W-R, and I had brought him safely back to earth, there to undo all that I had fought for so desperately!

I LUNGED swift as light, my hand clutching the warden's wrist as his fingers curled about the butt of the flame-pistol. We struggled furiously, but mine was the effort of despair with the fate of a great cause depending on it. Slowly I twisted his arm back, while the sweat of death itself broke out on our foreheads. The pistol dropped from nerveless fingers and I snatched it in a flash and stabbed a ray of flame at him that burned him down like a smoking straw! I pressed the control button, pulled down the porcelain lever that operated the corridor panel. A moment later the haggard figure of Woodruff, wide-eyed with amazement, appeared in the opening.

There was no time to explain. I rushed him to the door—and crashed full tilt into a man in the brown uniform of an International guard. My pistol blazed a split second before his own, and he fell, his life burned out in a fierce gust of flame. But the ray from his own weapon seared my hand and I involuntarily dropped the weapon almost at Akridge's feet.

Before I could leap he would have the weapon! But my arm, in recoiling from the hurt of the burn, had brushed the ovoid in my pocket, and in a single movement I snatched it and smashed it full in his white face as he looked up. Phosphorescent slime streamed over him, a slime that, contacting with the oxygen in the atmosphere, burst into flame. He screamed once, horribly, and slumped, a crumpling pillar of white fire.

I rushed Woodruff to the space-flyer and slammed home the air-lock, as the courtyard filled with reserve guards, who hurried toward the dwindling cinder of what had once been a traitor.

We shot through the atmosphere into the freedom of space. The colonies were safe!

The Whistle

By RALPH MILNE FARLEY

The story of a strident siren that brought a whole city to the verge of madness —a bizarre extravaganza

POLICE COMMISSIONER GODFREY grimly picked up the ringing telephone-set from his desk.

"If this is another call about that damn whistle," he announced, "I believe I shall go coocoo."

Then he lifted the receiver from its hook, and placed it to his ear.

"Hello," said he. "Police Commissioner speaking."

"Now, Mr. Commissioner," said a high-pitched female voice over the wire, "can't you do something about that whistle? You see——"

Slam went the receiver! He saw, all right. Then he rang for his secretary.

"Miss Burns," he directed crisply, when she arrived, "will you please go out to our telephone desk just as fast as you can travel, and tell the phone girl to ring me herself immediately, and *not* to give me back that outside call which I just hung up on. Do you get me? Then toddle!"

Miss Burns toddled.

In a minute the commissioner's phone rang again. Again he answered it. But this time it was not the raucous voice of the previous call.

Instead he heard, in sweet musical tones, "This is the phone girl, Commissioner. And I understood your orders all right, not to put any more calls through to you about the whistle. But that last call was the Mayor's wife, so I thought——"

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "Why didn't you say so in the first place? Try and get her back again for me, like a good girl!"

"Here she is now," said the sweet voice.

Then again the strident female accents, "Mr. Commissioner, they cut us off. This is Mrs. Ransome, wife of Mayor Ransome, you know. Can't you do something to stop that awful whistle?"

"What awful whistle?" he inquired, sparring for time.

"Haven't you heard it?" asked Mrs. Ransome in surprize. Then, "But I suppose you are too far downtown. It's driving us all crazy up in the residential section. It's been blowing steadily all morning, and it sounds as though it was slightly off the pitch, or something. A horrible, grating sound. Isn't there a law against factories and factory-whistles in residential districts? I thought we had a zoning ordinance, or something."

"What direction is it in?" he inquired.

"It's just in the direction of my sewing-room windows," she replied. "Let's see. That's away from downtown, so it must be north. Yes, I'm sure it's due north."

"Very well, Madam," he promised. "I'll put detectives on it at once, and have it stopped. It's an outrage!"

"Thank you so much," she murmured. "Good-bye."

And she hung up. So did he. He wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

It was indeed an outrage. All day long his telephone had been kept ringing with complaints about that confounded whistle—complaints from frantic women, women who became more and more frantic as the day wore on.

Finally the Commissioner had put a stop-order on all such calls. He could

"On the curb sat a man, with his feet in the gutter and both hands to his ears. A disheveled woman ran by, screaming, pursued by a policeman."

hear the whistle himself through the open windows of the City Hall. It was an annoying, nerve-racking sort of a whistle, but it hadn't really gotten on his nerves so much as had all these women who had kept phoning him about it.

Undoubtedly some factory-siren had become stuck. Its owners were in the best position of any one to fix it, and undoubtedly were taking the proper steps. It might stop any moment now. So what business was it of his to interfere?

That is to say, what business was it of his until the Mayor's wife butted in? Her interest in the whistle altered the situation in an instant, for Commissioner Godfrey's job depended upon his remaining in the good graces of Mayor Ransome.

So the Commissioner rang for the Chief of the Bureau of Criminal Investigation, Captain Atwater. That official promptly reported.

"Atwater," demanded Mr. Godfrey, "what have you done toward locating that awful whistle?"

"Nothing much, sir," replied the Captain, with a grin. "All stations were instructed, early this morning, to have all patrolmen report whether or not the whistle was on his beat. All reported that it was not, so I dropped the matter. Why?"

"Atwater," asserted the Commissioner, solemnly, "this has become serious. The Mayor's wife——"

"Hell!" interrupted the other, suddenly becoming interested.

"Yes," continued Godfrey. "The old vixen herself got after me. She just phoned. If we don't stop that whistle at once, you and I had better start out to look for another job."

"I have it!" exclaimed the bureau chief, brightening, "We'll have each station locate it by compass, and then we'll plot all the lines on a map."

"Bully!" exclaimed the Commissioner, ringing for his secretary.

As MISS BURNS entered, he fired at her, "Take this, rush. Telephonic orders to all stations. The sergeant in charge will get out on the station-house roof at once with a compass, note the exact direction of that damn whistle—strike out the word 'damn', Miss Burns—of that whistle, and phone the direction to the Commissioner personally at City Hall. End of order. And tell 'em to make it snappy. And, Miss Burns, as soon as you've typed that and given it to the phone girl, bring me in the police map. You know the one I mean, the big map out of the directory pasted on a sheet of cardboard, with all the stations on it in red. Now toddle!"

Miss Burns toddled.

"We'll need a protractor," asserted Atwater.

"A what?"

"A protractor. One of those things you measure angles with."

"We'll have to make one then," replied the Commissioner. "Anyhow, they won't be reporting by angles, will they? It'll be north and south, and east-southwest, and all that sort of rot, won't it?"

"I suppose so," agreed the Captain. "Let's make one of them that way, then."

So the two officials were hard at work trying to remember the points of the compass, and put them down on paper, when Miss Burns returned with the map. Fortunately there was an elaborate and beautifully drawn compass in the lower right-hand corner of the city map; so the two men traced it onto a sheet of thin paper. Then they got out a pencil and a long ruler, and stood ready.

Pretty soon the first report came in, "The whistle is due east of Station 6."

So they drew a line on the map, due east from Station 6.

Scarcely had they done this, when Station 8 reported that the whistle was about northwest of there. That line was likewise drawn.

"Aha!" exclaimed the Commissioner. "The lines cross exactly at Jones's soap factory, in District 7. The dirty pup! He headed the citizen's committee against Mayor Ransome in the last election. Just wait till I send a squad over from Station 7, and put Mr. Jones in the cooler for indecent disturbance!"

He picked up the phone to call Station 7, but there was an incoming call on the wire: "Station 9 reports that the whistle is southeast."

"Plot it down, Atwater," commanded Commissioner Godfrey.

Atwater did so. The new line crossed each of the other two, several blocks away from the Jones factory.

"Um!" said the Commissioner, pursing up his lips. "Not so good!"

So, instead of calling Station 7 and directing the arrest of Mr. Jones, he called Station 9 back again.

"Sergeant," said he, "Commissioner speaking. Try that direction again. You're pretty rotten."

The two men waited nervously for a few moments. Through the open windows they could distinctly hear that awful off-pitch whistle. Newsboys began crying extras about the whistle, in the streets outside.

Then the sergeant at Station 9 phoned apologetically, "I guess we were all wet, Chief. The whistle is due *north*east."

Atwater plotted that direction, then exclaimed, "My God, sir! Worse, and more of it! It doesn't cross the other two lines at all now!"

Commissioner Godfrey was just about to call Station 9 a third time, and give the sergeant there a real dressing-down, when he was interrupted by the rapidly successive reports from practically all the other stations.

As fast as these reports came in, Atwater drew the lines on the map.

Finally there was a lull in the incoming calls, and the Commissioner turned to view the handiwork of his assistant. Then he gasped. The lines went every which way, all over the map. None except the original two came anywhere near the Jones soap factory.

For a few moments, the two men stared speechless at the map. They weren't even thinking. They were merely staring with the same dumb paralysis of fear which affects a stupid student in an examination. They were worrying about the problem, rather than thinking about it.

At last, the Commissioner broke the silence.

"We *must* think!" said he, determinedly.

"A good idea," assented the other, hurriedly.

Godfrey glared at him.

Then, "I have it!" exclaimed Atwater, "I remember reading once in the Sunday paper, in an article on sounds, that the human ears can't tell whether a sound is in front or behind. A man, trying to locate a sound, turns his head until the sound comes either directly in front of him, or directly behind him."

"Well, what good is that going to do us?" asked the Commissioner.

"It's going to solve our problem, that's what it's going to do," replied the other, confidently. "We'll run all our lines just the opposite way from each station too. This will give us a point through which one line, either the forward one or the backward one, from each station, will pass. Come on! Let's go!"

Quickly the lines on the map were extended backward. But still the helter-skelter! There was hardly a ward of the city that did not have at least one intersection of lines in it. Any one of these intersections might be the true location of the whistle. Thus the whistle might be almost anywhere in the big city.

And still its awful screech resounded through the open windows, and still the newsboys cried their extras in the streets below.

There was just one ray of sunshine to the whole situation: two more of the lines

passed very close to old Jones's factory.

Miss Burns stuck her head through the door.

"The Mayor's wife is on the phone again," she announced. "What shall I say?"

The Commissioner passed his hand across his worried brow.

"Tell her to go jump in the lake!" he exclaimed. Then, "No, no! Tell her that I'm out with Captain Atwater. Tell her that we've located the whistle, approximately; and hope to have it stopped very soon now."

"Very well, sir," replied the girl, and withdrew.

Commissioner Godfrey seized the phone and called Station 7.

"Sergeant," he bellowed, "send a squad over to the Jones factory on the double-quick. Tell them to stop that whistle at once. And if that old fool Jones is there himself, arrest him as a suspicious character, or a public nuisance, or something. And phone me as soon as you get back. Step on it!"

Then turning to Atwater, he announced, "As soon as we get that whistle stopped, the sergeants who reported the wrong directions are going to catch hell!"

Miss Burns entered with an assortment of afternoon papers. The two men pounced on them. The main news sections were chiefly devoted to the whistle. There were several columns of statements as to the direction from which the sound appeared to come. These directions, if plotted on a map, would have been even more helter-skelter than the lines already plotted in the Commissioner's office.

"I guess our sergeants aren't so crazy, after all," asserted Atwater.

The telephone rang. It was Station 7 reporting, "The whistle isn't at the Jones factory, sir. Their boiler is shut down, so it couldn't be them."

"Hell!" exclaimed the Commissioner. "Mrs. Ransome will be calling up again in a few minutes. Let's beat it out to lunch before she does."

So the two men left the office together. When they reached the steps of City Hall, the wail of the whistle first really began to get under their skins. Its sound seemed to permeate the atmosphere, to be omnipresent, coming from no particular direction. No wonder the police sergeants had had difficulty in locating it!

The sound just barely missed having the same effect on the two officials as biting the tines of a fork, or the scratching of a gritty chalk on a blackboard. They could easily imagine its effect on persons whose ears were attuned to a slightly different pitch than theirs.

On the curb in front of them sat a man, with his feet in the gutter and both hands to his ears, rocking to and fro, and moaning softly. A disheveled woman rushed by, screaming, pursued by a policeman. A full ambulance dashed down the street, adding the clangor of its gong to the general confusion.

As the Commissioner and his assistant walked across the sidewalk to the waiting police car, they passed an old man, who was chewing his finger-nails and muttering to himself.

"My God!" exclaimed the Commissioner. "If this keeps up, half the city will be loony before night. And here was I worrying about my own troubles!"

The trip to the club was difficult. Traffic had become disorganized. The drivers were nervous and frantic, and the little whistles of the traffic cops seemed to blend soundlessly with the all-pervasive larger sound.

Even during the short time that the two officials were at lunch, affairs had become

noticeably worse. On their way back to City Hall, they noticed that a larger percentage of the autoists and pedestrians were acting erratically. They even saw one traffic cop suddenly put his hands to his ears, leave his post, and run frantically up the street like a hunted animal.

By the time they reached City Hall again, they both were in a mood for drastic action.

"What do you do in cases like this, anyhow?" demanded Commissioner Godfrey.

"I call up the university," replied the bureau chief. "Let's see. What department would know about this? When we had that last murder mystery, you remember, the dead body with no cause of death, I called up the professor of anatomy. And when——"

"Never mind what you did once before!" bellowed Godfrey. "What are you going to do now? What do I have you for, anyhow?"

"Let's see," mused Captain Atwater. "The trouble is a sound. I'll call the professor of sound. That ought to be in the physics department, oughtn't it?"

"Search me," replied the Commissioner, handing over the phone. "Hop to it!"

Captain Atwater got the university, and soon arranged for Professor Long, the great physicist, author of *Long on Sound*, to come right over to headquarters.

Then the two men read the latest papers, and listened to the whistle. Miss Burns entered.

Said she, "The Mayor's wife is on the phone again, sir. She says that the whistle didn't stop, as you said it would; and what are you going to do about it?"

A grim calmness settled over the Commissioner.

"Tell her," he replied, "that Captain Atwater and I are still out, and that you will give me her message when we return."

The girl withdrew, but in a moment was back to announce Professor Long.

The professor was a keen, forceful-looking, rather youngish man, not at all the comic-paper professorial type.

Yes, he had heard the whistle. Who hadn't? No, he had no theories about it. It hadn't bothered *him* any. But if any one wished it investigated——"

"The Mayor's wife wants it investigated—and stopped!" bellowed Godfrey.

"What has been done already?" asked Doctor Long, calmly.

So they told him, and showed him the map.

"Um," said he.

Then he went into action. He phoned the Armory, roused the non-com in charge, inquired the name and office telephone number of the commanding officer of the local Anti-Aircraft Company, phoned him, and had him assemble the men of his sound-ranging unit post-haste. In a surprizingly short time, they began to drift in to headquarters. They were enthusiastic at this opportunity to put their training to some practical use.

The young lieutenant in command explained the apparatus to the Commissioner. They had three sets of instruments. These could be placed at three strategic points throughout the city. Each would give exactly the direction of the sound from that spot, to the nearest degree. The triangle of error, where the three lines intersected, would be almost negligibly small, and easily adjusted.

"Where are your three sets of apparatus?" asked the Commissioner.

"Right here outside City Hall, sir, mounted on three army trucks," replied the young lieutenant.

"Who draws the lines on the maps?"

"My plotting-squad, sir. They could work right here, sir, on your map."

"Very well," said the Commissioner.

"Go to it! Set up your instruments in front of Stations 6, 8 and 9, and phone in your results to here from those stations."

THE young army lieutenant gave the necessary orders, and all of his men departed, except the plotting-squad and himself.

Commissioner Godfrey phoned instructions to the three police stations to co-operate. Then they waited, while that awful whistle still shrieked outside.

In a very few minutes, the three directions came in over the wire, and were duly plotted on the map.

But the three lines didn't intersect at all. Instead, they diverged away from the common center.

"Run them backward," suggested the Commissioner, gazing longingly at the spot on the map which marked the location of the Jones soap factory.

But Professor Long interposed, "No, that isn't possible with a sound-ranger. They aren't like human ears. A sound-ranger gives the *actual* direction."

And the young army lieutenant nodded assent.

Then said he, "Perhaps the whistle is running round all over town, and my three squads didn't take their readings simultaneously. May I, sir?"

He indicated the phone. The Commissioner nodded. Anything to keep the line busy, so that Mayor Ransome's wife couldn't call up.

So the young army officer phoned each of his three instrument squads, calibrated their watches to his, and ordered them to range on the whistle at exactly five minutes past.

They did so. And their results, when plotted this time, again diverged, but in three different directions from before.

Every one looked glum, except Professor Long, whose face suddenly brightened.

"I have an idea!" he exclaimed.

Every one else brightened.

"But," he continued, "I can't tell you what it is until I try it out."

Every one's face fell.

"I'm going home," announced the Commissioner heavily. "My home phone has a secret number, and so the Mayor's wife can't reach me there. Atwater, tell Miss Burns to tell all callers that I'm out with you, working on the case. And then you'd better scatter too. Good-bye, gentlemen. Thank you all for *trying* to help me."

There was almost a sneer in that word "trying."

"May I have that number, Mr. Commissioner?" asked the professor. "I may have something to report."

Godfrey scribbled a number on a card, and handed it over. Then he and the professor left. The others tried the sound-ranging several times more, but the direction-lines remained practically the same as the last time, and totally failed to converge.

Finally they gave it up, and disbanded.

THE whistle continued to grate on the nerves of the now-frantic city. The evening papers reported more and more mental cases admitted to the hospitals, and a general exodus of those who had, or could afford, transportation.

Practically every evening paper carried an editorial, petulantly demanding action by the city government.

Commissioner Godfrey—risking getting Mrs. Ransome on the phone—called up Mayor Ransome. For some time, over the phone, they discussed how best to reply to these newspaper broadsides. The whistle was beginning to get on even *their* iron nerves. They felt the impending downfall of their administration, if they did not act quickly and properly.

Finally they issued a brief joint statement, challenging the newspapers to locate the whistle themselves, if they were so smart; and promising to suppress it, and to inflict dire penalties upon the perpetrator, the very moment that any one would tell them where to find it. But lest this retort be considered to constitute merely passing the buck, they added that the best scientific mind in the city, namely, Professor Long of the University, author of *Long on Sound,* had been employed on the case.

This statement silenced the newspapers, although it did not silence the whistle. And it had another effect.

Shortly after the extras, containing this statement, were on the street, the Commissioner's phone rang.

When he answered the call, a strange voice informed him, "This is the Whistle speaking."

Indignantly he slammed down the receiver. Wasn't the situation bad enough, without practical jokers butting in?"

But his caller was persistent. Again the phone rang, and again came the message, "This is the Whistle."

Commissioner Godfrey called the chief operator, identified himself, and directed that if that call came again, it was to be traced, and Chief Inspector Atwater be notified, rush. Then Godfrey phoned Atwater to stand ready to rush a motorcycle policeman to arrest the person who dared to trifle with this serious situation.

The call came again, and Godfrey let the man talk, so as to give the telephone company plenty of time to trace the connection, and to give Atwater plenty of time to make the arrest.

"This is the Whistle," said the voice. "I am much displeased that you have put Professor Long on my trail. Unless you recall him at once, I shall not be responsible for the outcome."

Just to humor the man, and hold him on the line as long as possible, Godfrey asked, "And if we recall the professor, will you stop your infernal noise?"

"All in due time," replied the voice. "The city has not yet been reduced to quite the abject terror that is necessary to my purposes. When the time is ripe, I shall phone you again and make a proposition to you."

Commissioner Godfrey argued with the man, and strung him along on every possible pretext, for the hope was slowly dawning on the Commissioner that perhaps this man might actually have something to do with the whistle after all, and that through his arrest they might get a clue as to the location of the whistle.

But finally the man, after giving another warning as to Professor Long, rang off.

Instantly the Commissioner called the chief operator of the telephone company.

"Did you trace that call and notify Atwater?" he eagerly inquired.

"No call was reported here," replied the phone official. "Just a moment. I will investigate and call you back. Hang up, please."

So Godfrey hung up, and waited impatiently.

In a moment the chief operator reported, "The girl on your switchboard says that no call has been put through to you in the past half-hour."

The Commissioner stormed and argued, but it was no use. The official stuck to his story. So all that could be done was to caution him to be more careful next time.

Commissioner Godfrey was not given much leisure to ponder on this latest development, for his phone rang again. This time it was Professor Long. His voice was vibrant with excitement.

"I've got them!" he panted. "But they

nearly got me. I know what the Whistle is now. It's a most diabolical plot against the city, on the part of some desperate and brilliant criminals. I can stop it, and I'm going to. But it may cost me my life. It's got to be handled alone and single-handed."

"Where are you?" interrupted the Commissioner.

"If I told you, you'd interfere," replied the professor. "Good-bye."

And he hung up.

Frantically the Commissioner rang the chief operator.

"Did you trace the call this time?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the official, "and I notified Atwater. His motorcycle cop is on the way there already."

Then he gave Godfrey the location, a drug-store on the outskirts of the city. The Commissioner hurried there in his own car.

He found Atwater already in charge, questioning the druggist, and all other occupants of the store, and every one in the immediate neighborhood. Operatives were combing the surrounding streets. But, although Professor Long had been seen in the drug-store, no further traces of him could be found.

At last the excitement died down. All the operatives came in. Every one who could possibly give any information had been interviewed, without results. A lull descended over the group of policemen and police officials.

And then the Commissioner made a great discovery.

"Why!" he exclaimed. "The Whistle has stopped!"

So it had. The Administration was saved.

But no trace of Professor Long was ever found.

Last Jest

By KIRK MASHBURN

When I must tryst with Death, I pray
The trysting-place be where I play
With friends who make a merry crowd,
And wrong me not with one head bowed.

I hope I'll just have drained a cup
And left it still turned bravely up.
I hope I go held closely prest
Against my Love's warm, yielding breast—

I hope I feel her lips on mine,
The while her hair my fingers twine:
Until I spend my waning breath
To fling one final jest—at Death.

"As I reeled backward, my outflung hand touched the table and my fingers closed on the little cross."

Vampire Village

By HUGH DAVIDSON

A strange story of the ghoul-haunted village of Wieslant, and the eery adventure of two American travelers

"KNOCK again," I told Croft. "There's always some one up in these village inns, and it's not midnight yet."

"I've almost hammered the door down already," he replied. "Either these Transylvanians sleep like the dead or—what the devil!"

"What's the matter?" I inquired. He was shaking his hand ruefully.

"Bruised my knuckles on something on the door," he said irritably. He detached it from the door, then passed it to me. I saw that it was a little wooden cross. "A mighty inconvenient way of expressing religious fervor!" exclaimed Croft, as he knocked again.

I looked up and down the white road, gleaming in the starlight. Along it were strung the score or so of high-peaked frame cottages that formed the village of Kranzak. Croft and I had counted, as we had swung through the Transylvanian hills all day and evening, on getting here a late supper and lodging for the night.

But now Kranzak seemed to offer small prospect of either supper or bed, for from the shuttered windows of its houses showed no lights, and our hammering at the inn's door had produced no response. We had heard voices inside the inn as we had approached it but at our first knock they had become abruptly silent.

Croft, annoyed by hurting his hand on the cross, called out now in our defective Hungarian. "Let us in! This is an inn, isn't it?"

An elderly, tremulous voice answered. "It is the inn of Kranzak, yes, but it opens to no one tonight."

"Why not?" my companion demanded.

The same voice answered. "Because this is the night of vampires, sirs! The night of St. George, when all those who were in life vampires and servants of evil rise again to work evil until dawn. No door here in Kranzak will open until dawn."

"Night of the devil!" I exclaimed. "What kind of craziness is this?"

Croft laughed, turning from the door. "No use, Barton. We've run into their superstitions and it looks like no lodging for us tonight."

A different and shriller voice called from inside. "If you want lodging go on to Wieslant!" it told us, and was followed by a buzz of three or four voices within.

We stepped back into the road, baffled, looking along the village's houses. Each had some sort of cross at its door and each was still dark and without invitation.

"Well, it looks as if we go on to Wieslant, wherever it may be," I said.

"Wieslant—I don't remember it on the map," Croft said. "But these villages are all pretty close together, so it can't be far."

"Forward march, then," I ordered, and we started along the road in the starlight.

"The night of St. George—night of the vampires," I repeated, as we swung out of the village and on through the dark pine woods. "Was that whole village sitting behind locked doors in fear of that old vampire superstition, Croft?"

He nodded. "It's a very deep belief here in Transylvania. These Transylvanians believe implicitly that when people die who have sold themselves to evil they become, not dead, but undead—become vampires who rise from their tombs by night to suck blood and life from others."

"I've read something of the belief, of course," I said, "but I thought vampires could rise any night between sunset and dawn. I didn't know this St. George's night was the only night in the year in which they could rise."

Croft laughed. "There's a distinction between vampires, Barton. All vampires can rise from their graves each night until priests have carried out over their graves the binding and exorcising rites that prison them there. But on this one night each year, St. George's night, even these prisoned vampires, who far outnumber the others, can rise and work evil until dawn."

"Which is why St. George's night finds them locked up back there at Kranzak," I said, shaking my head. "And those crosses on the doors?" I asked,

jerking a thumb toward the little wooden one Croft had passed me, which I had thrust into my breast-pocket.

He smiled. "To protect them from the vampires tonight, of course. A cross is the one sure weapon against vampires, you know, the one thing they fear. It's all mighty interesting, this vampire superstition."

"And mighty inconvenient for us," I added. "If this Wieslant's people are as terrorized by vampires tonight as Kranzak's, we're out of luck for sure."

WE HITCHED our knapsacks higher on our shoulders and bent to the steady task of walking. The white road wound through dense forests up a long slope that seemed a pass between the big hills ahead and to the right. There was no moon, but the thin starlight outlined the road clearly in its windings through the dark pine woods.

As we swung on for steady mile after mile it came to me that the very gloominess of this somber Transylvanian landscape must be at the bottom of its people's fearful beliefs. It would be easy to believe, I speculated, that in the midnight darkness of the hills about us supernatural beings of evil were moving, loosed this one night from the tomb.

We could see once or twice black flying-shapes of considerable size moving in the starlight low over distant woods. And while it was apparent enough to Croft and me that these must be hawks or owls searching the night forests for prey, I could well see, I thought, how any Transylvanians seeing them would believe them vampires abroad on this, their night.

Croft's voice at last interrupted my speculations. "There are the lights of a village down there," he announced. "Wieslant's, I suppose."

We had reached the rim of a bowl-shaped valley some miles across that was encircled by the hills. Down in the darkness at this bowl's center gleamed a little pattern of lights, with at one spot the redder glow of fires.

"Nothing shut up about Wieslant, apparently," I said with rising spirits. "We may get supper and a bed tonight, after all."

"Looks as though there's a chance of it, at any rate," Croft agreed.

We swung down into the bowl-like valley toward the village's lights. Wieslant, it was apparent as we entered it, was a place unusually ancient, for the houses along its little streets were more antique in appearance than any we had yet seen. They had the grotesquely carved scroll-work and odd-shaped doors and windows common to the houses of the section a few hundred years ago.

These houses were illuminated with yellow candle-light but we could see no occupants in them as we passed among them. The reason for this was explained when we neared the open green at the village's center; for large fires were burning there, swift, gay music was audible, and gathered round the fire-lit green and dancing to the music were the people of Wieslant.

As Croft and I approached we could see these people only as black shapes dancing between us and the glowing fires. Their dark forms spun with such swiftness that to us, with the light in our eyes, they seemed to leave the ground and whirl through the air in the mad rush of the dance. Croft and I drew nearer and stopped in the shadows outside the fire-lit green's circle, watching with astonishment.

A half-dozen fires spilled ruddy light across the green, and around each fire one of the strange dances was going on. The dancers were clad, the men in outlandish brilliant jackets and tight trous-

ers, the women in similarly bright skirts and bodices, the festal attire of Transylvanian peasants. Yet these costumes were of an older and odder style than any others we had seen.

Around the green's edge in the firelight were a hundred or two villagers watching and applauding the dance. They were clad like the dancers, there being in fact no modern dress visible. At one place was a peasant orchestra of stringed instruments pouring out the wild, swift music. Beside this a tall, white-mustached and fierce-faced oldster was calling above the din to the dancers as they whirled and spun.

I had never seen such a strange picture of mad gayety, and Croft and I watched marvelling from back in the shadows. These anciently dressed villagers seemed flinging themselves into the merriment of the dance with utter abandon. The eyes of dancers and spectators alike glowed crimson, apparently from reflected firelight.

Suddenly one of the spectators glimpsed Croft and me back in the dark. He uttered a stabbing cry, and instantly all of them were rushing toward us.

IN OUR momentary stupefaction it almost seemed that they were hurtling through the air to attack us, a crowded vision of crimson eyes and white-gleaming teeth. But when almost upon Croft and me they stopped short as though struck back!

They encircled us, giving vent to a babble of excited cries in a Hungarian dialect that was almost beyond our understanding, while their excited, gleaming eyes held upon us. The din was immense.

"Excitable beggars, aren't they?" said Croft. "Can you make out what they're shouting about?"

"Not while they're all crying at once," I answered. "What's the matter with them? I thought for a moment they were attacking us."

"These Transylvanians are all an excitable bunch," he said. "This looks like the head-man of the village coming, and he ought to be able to calm them down."

It was the tall, white-mustached oldster who had been calling to the dancers who now shouldered through the throng toward us. He was dressed like the rest in the brilliant ancient festal costume, which set off his tall figure well enough. He bowed to us, his eyes sharp upon ours.

"Welcome to Wieslant, sirs," he addressed us, in the oddly-twisted dialect of the others. "We did not expect strangers here tonight."

"I'm sorry if we've intruded on your festal celebrations," Croft told him. "We didn't mean to do so."

The other waved the apology aside smilingly. "My people here—I am Mihai Hallos, head-man of Wieslant—see but few strangers and so are excited when any visit our little village."

"Well, it's not by intention we came," Croft said. "Back at the last village, Kranzak, every one was locked up for fear of vampires. They must have been afraid we were vampires ourselves, for they wouldn't let us in but told us to go on to Wieslant."

Hallos' smile deepened and a laugh ran through the crowd. "Kranzak's people are much afraid of vampires on this night, it is true," the head-man said, "for not far from Kranzak was located the vampire village."

"Vampire village?" Croft repeated interrogatively, but Hallos waved his hand. "It is a belief in this part of Transylvania —I will tell you the story later. It keeps many villages in fear on this night."

"Well, I'm glad at any rate it doesn't keep you of Wieslant locked up," I re-

marked. "We didn't fancy walking all night."

"You'll find excellent accommodations here at Wieslant," Hallos assured me. "Indeed, you could have come at no better time than tonight."

Again the chuckling laugh ran through the crowd, though I could see nothing humorous in the words. These gleaming-eyed, strangely dressed villagers were making both Croft and myself rather uncomfortable by their staring at us from all sides, and Hallos must have seen this.

"Our inn is over there at the green's edge," he said. "May I not lead you there?"

We protested against his taking the trouble, but with true Transylvanian courtesy he waved our protests aside. Hallos motioned the villagers to make way for us and was turning again toward us when I bumped awkwardly into him face to face.

To my surprize he staggered and fell to his knees, his hand on his heart and his face contorted by a spasm of agony. He regained his feet, though, before we had time to help him up, and I apologized as best I could for my clumsiness.

"It was not your fault," he said with hand still on his breast, "but I have a weakness here and the thing in your breast-pocket prodded me when we collided."

I looked down and saw projecting from my breast-pocket the little wooden cross Croft had handed me at Kranzak, which I had forgotten. "I'm very sorry," I said. "It was stupid of me to run into you."

Hallos smiled and shook his head, but I noticed as we started through the crowd toward the inn that he kept Croft between him and myself. Apparently he did not intend trusting himself again to my awkwardness.

And as we moved through the gay-dressed villagers who parted to allow us passage I even thought that they shrank rather farther away from me than from Croft. It was a little discomfiting to me.

Hallos talked on urbanely as he led us to the inn. The music behind us had recommenced and the villagers were again dancing by the time we came to the ancient-looking inn at the green's edge.

WE FOLLOWED the head-man into the stone-paved, broad-beamed tavern-room. A great fire flickered in a wall-fireplace, and behind the small bar at the room's end the fat and white-haired innkeeper was serving bottles of queer, twisted shapes to a dozen gay-costumed men and women.

They had been engaged in wild talk and laughter as we entered but fell dead silent at sight of Hallos and ourselves, staring toward us. I was struck again by the trick of the firelight falling upon these people's faces to make their eyes seem somehow crimson-lit.

The fat innkeeper came forward and Hallos made introduction.

"This is Kallant, innkeeper of Wieslant and as excellent a one as can be found in Transylvania," he told us smilingly. "He will be glad to see you, for it is not often he lodges strangers."

"Not often," admitted the fat Kallant, laughing in a strange way. "In fact, it is not often that I have custom of any kind. You will wish two rooms, sirs?"

"Oh, one room will do for both of us," Croft answered. "We're more concerned about supper than the room, right now."

"If you will do us an honor," Hallos interjected. "Our Wieslant festivities on this feast-night continue all night, and some of us leading villagers always have supper here at two o'clock. You would honor us by joining us."

"We'll be honored to do so," Croft

said. "It's almost two now, so Barton and I had better brush up a little."

"I will show you the room, sirs," said Kallant, turning with a candle toward the narrow stair that rose back in the shadows.

We were entering the dark stairway with him when Hallos' voice stopped us. He was gesturing with an amused smile toward the wooden cross that still projected from my breast-pocket.

"That emblem of piety were best left in your room, sir," he told me smilingly. "On this night piety is forgotten here and we think but of merriment."

Croft and I laughed. "It's not really mine," I told the head-man, "but of course I'll leave it. I don't want to be the skeleton at your feast."

As we went up the dark narrow stairway after the fat Kallant I heard a sudden babble of wild voices break out in the tavern-room we had just quitted. There cut across them and silenced them the sharp voice of Hallos, and I smiled at this evidence that our courtly host could play the tyrant over his simple subjects when so inclined.

The stair led up into a long hall dimly lit by one or two candles in wall-sockets along it. There were doors but half visible in the shadows, and Kallant led us to one of these and opened it, gesturing inside as he placed his candle in a socket inside the door.

"This will suit you, sirs," he told us. "It's a little musty—we don't often have custom here—but should be comfortable enough."

"It's quite all right," we assured him. "Tell Hallos we'll be down in a few moments." He bowed and withdrew. We looked about us.

"Musty is right," I commented. "Looks as if it hadn't been used for centuries."

The room, in fact, was covered with dust that lay thick over the floor and furniture and old-fashioned wooden bed. Through the odd-shaped windows we could glimpse the green outside, where the fires still were burning and the dark shadows of the dancers whirling to the wild music.

Croft and I spruced up as well as possible and then left the room. When we emerged from the dark stairway into the inn's tavern-room again we found the head-man Hallos there with two dozen or more men and women. They were without exception dressed in the antique festal costumes to which we were now accustomed.

Hallos almost rushed to meet us as we entered the tavern-room, his eyes alight. But a little from us he stopped, staring at my breast.

I looked down and saw that I had forgotten to discard the little wooden cross from that pocket. "Oh, I'm sorry," I said. "But I suppose having the thing doesn't really matter?"

"Of course not," he told me courteously. "Will you not meet some of our people? These are my own two daughters."

He made introductions and we chatted as best we could in our halting Hungarian with the gay groups. I was somewhat chagrined, I admit, to see that they tended to gather around Croft and to avoid me. Recalling the head-man's words, I supposed they judged from the cross projecting from my pocket that I was some strict and serious devotee.

Croft saw my isolation and shot amused glances at me now and then, for he was making great progress with the two brilliant-cheeked beauties Hallos had introduced as his daughters. Hallos himself talked with me, though at a little distance, until the fat Kallant appeared from another room to announce that the supper was ready.

We passed into the candle-lit dining-hall, where a long table laden with Transylvanian dishes and wines awaited us. Hallos seated himself at the table's end with Croft and the younger daughter at his right, and me and the elder daughter at his left. But before I could address a word to this elder sister she pulled her chair as far as possible from me and turned her back upon me to talk to her other neighbor.

THE supper was gay, and Croft and the younger sister opposite me were of the gayest, though I was feeling somewhat chagrined at the cold treatment these people accorded me. I made up for it by attacking the spicy foods and strong wines with vigor, nor was Croft much behind me, since we had not eaten for a dozen hours.

The foods and wines were as delicious as I had ever tasted but seemed strangely lacking in filling qualities; in fact, after disposing of a half-dozen dishes and several glasses I felt really as hungry as on beginning. Yet though Croft too looked a little puzzled, the others at table seemed not to notice it.

The room rang with laughter, chatter and clink of glasses, with echoes now and then of the dance-music from outside. Kallant hovered about to see that all were served, and at the table's end Hallos was the picture of a courteous host.

During a lull in the chatter of voices Croft addressed him. "You said you'd tell us about the vampire village located near Kranzak," he reminded. "I'd like to hear the story if the rest don't mind."

Hallos smiled and I saw suppressed mirth on the faces of our companions, Kallant grinning in the background. "Why, all here know it well," the headman said, "but if it would interest you——"

At our quick assurance he went on. "We of Transylvania have for many centuries known that vampires do exist. We have known that men and women who sell themselves in life to the forces of evil do not when they die become dead, but undead, vampires. By day vampires lie as though dead in their graves, but by night rise as though living and suck blood and life from whatever unprotected people they encounter.

"We Transylvanians know also that against the cross vampires are powerless. So whenever a vampire's grave is detected in this country, priests perform over it ceremonies of the cross that bind the vampire in his grave. Yet even vampires so bound and prisoned can on one night of the year, the night of St. George, still rise and work until dawn.

"Almost two hundred and fifty years ago there was in this section of Transylvania a village located not far from Kranzak. And this village near Kranzak came to be haunted by vampires as no village had ever been before. The forces of evil worked there until in the graves of that village lay some hundreds of vampires who came forth each night!

"It was, then, a vampire village! The living people left in it fled to Kranzak and other places, but the vampires remained. Each day that village lay deserted and untenanted beneath the sun. But each night the vampires rose to move through and inhabit the village as though alive, venturing often to attack people in near-by villages.

"So at last the people of the surrounding section came with many priests to put an end to this vampire village. Over each grave the priests carried out their binding rites, prisoning each vampire thus. From then on, though no living people ever again inhabited it, the vampires came forth no more by night save on

that one night each year, the night of St. George, when all vampires are freed. On that night the vampire village again swarms until dawn with its undead inhabitants."

"And since the night of St. George is tonight," Croft smiled, "they feared back in Kranzak that we two were from the vampire village?"

"That is so," said Hallos, also smiling, "for despite the centuries that have passed, they of Kranzak and the other villages still fear this night of the year when the vampire village wakes to life again."

"But you here in Wieslant tonight don't seem to have much fear of the village of vampires?" I said. They all laughed at that.

"It is because St. George is our patron, and so on his festal night we have his protection," Hallos explained, "and can give ourselves up to merrymaking without fear."

Croft shook his head. "Strange, the power of some of these beliefs," he said. "Yet they fit with your ancient houses and costumes, somehow."

The elder Hallos girl laughed. "These costumes we wear on this festal night, all of us, but they must seem very odd to you," she told Croft.

"They seem beautiful," he told her. "Yet they make me feel as though Barton and I had in some way strayed into the past."

"Our dances are ancient ones too on this night," she said. "Will you not come with my sister and me to watch them?"

Her invitation so pointedly excluded me that Croft shot a grinning glance at me as he accepted. "Coming along, Barton?" he asked as we all rose.

I shook my head. "I'm going upstairs and get some much-needed sleep," I told him. "It's almost morning, you know."

Our company passed back into the tavern-room, Croft between the two sisters and I with Hallos at my side. It was evident to me that Croft had made an impression on the two gay-clad beauties, for their eyes and little white teeth gleamed alike as they laughed up to him, their hands tightening on his arms in a caressing and almost possessive manner.

"I'll be up shortly, Barton," Croft told me as they turned to the door. "I could stand some sleep myself, all right."

"Sleep—there is enough of sleep in the world!" exclaimed the younger sister. "Tonight is a festal night and not for sleep but for life—for life!"

She spoke with astounding vehemence and with eyes really fiery, rather startling Croft, and myself also. Hallos, his own eyes crimson, shot her a furious look, and at that she dropped her lashes demurely.

As Croft went out with them I gave him a meaning glance telling him not to make a fool of himself over the two Transylvanian beauties. Most of the company followed them and I bade them a general good-night. To Hallos and Kallant, who remained, I added my thanks before starting up the stair.

As I went up the dark stairway I thought I heard a quick step below and turned, but there was no one beneath. I heard Hallos' voice hissing to some one, evidently Kallant—"Not yet, you fool, he has it still with him!"

Kallant's muttered answer was inaudible, but their dispute was apparently no affair of mine and I went on up to our room. In the dim candle-light the musty bed was unattractive, but I sat down, yawning, glancing out the dusty window. The fires on the green still glowed red, but the music had stopped and the dark shapes of the villagers seemed clustered round some object of interest.

I LOOSENED my collar, tossing onto the table with a smile the wooden cross whose significance of piety had given the villagers such a distaste for me. I was tossing our fat little blue guidebook after it when it occurred to me to look up Wieslant's exact location in it.

Croft had said that Wieslant was not on the map and I found it to be so, there being no village at all marked there between that of Kranzak and the distant one of Holf. Somewhat puzzled, I turned to the book's text but found no description of Wieslant there either, and was giving up with disgust at the inefficiency of guidebook-makers when the name "Wieslant" in a footnote caught my eye.

As I started to read this I was aware subconsciously of two things: of a rush and commotion among the dark crowd out on the village green, and of the rustling sound of some one moving in the hall outside my door. But had thunder detonated about me it could not have aroused in me the unutterable horror that was rising in me as I read the fine type of the footnote.

The words seemed dancing before my eyes — *"Wieslant . . . approximately midway between Kranzak and Holf . . . deserted entirely in 1683 through fear of vampires . . . still called in that section 'the vampire village' . . . now almost wholly in——"* And even as the terrific truth smashed home to my reeling brain there thrust to my ears from the green outside an agonized scream in Croft's voice.

I leapt across the room and flung the door open. Hallos and Kallant stood out-it with eyes gleaming hell-crimson at me out of the faces of fiends. The two shot as one through the air toward me and as they bore me backward I felt their sharp fangs at my throat, felt in my face their breath like airs of cold corruption from the grave.

But as I reeled backward with those two hell-vampires upon me, my outflung hand touched the table, and something on the table that my fingers closed on instinctively and that I thrust against them. It was the little cross, and as it touched them it hurled them back across the room and against the wall as though titanic forces had smitten them.

With eyes red flames of hell, Hallos and Kallant glared from there at me as I swayed to the door, Croft's scream stabbing again and weaker to my ears. I was flinging myself down the dark stairway with the two black, fire-eyed shapes of Hallos and Kallant after me, the cross still clutched in my grasp. I was reeling out onto the green to hear again Croft's muffled cry.

Croft was down and the madly whirling, scarlet-eyed vampire throng was upon him, white teeth seeking his throat. Half of them were rushing toward me, black fiend-shapes against the fires that were dimming as a faint promise of light showed eastward; black vampire-shapes that were about me and separating me from Croft.

They recoiled and parted as I stumbled forward, extending the cross. They raged about me like mad shadow-shapes of hell, their baffled shrieks in my ears. I was at Croft's side, and those upon him recoiled as I dropped beside him with the cross. He seemed senseless, and I felt my own senses going and the cross dropping from my weakened fingers as around us raged the ghastly vampire-horde.

They were closing upon us as the cross slipped from my nerveless hand—the fiend-faces of Hallos and his daughters and all the others spun closer in a mad vista of red eyes and avid lips and sharp white teeth—and then from the paling east struck a gray shaft of dawn. In-

stantly it was as though gray mist enveloped the vampire throng and all the village about us, a mist that darkened in my mind as I lost consciousness.

THE dawnlight eastward had changed from gray to gold when I came back to consciousness. Croft was stirring weakly, and as he sat up I saw and picked from the ground beside me, automatically, a little wooden cross. We staggered to our feet and gazed dazedly about us.

Ancient, weed-grown ruins stretched in the golden light around us. There were broken masonry outlines of building foundations, and in one place an enclosure of half-visible, time-worn tombstones, but there was no standing house or structure, or any sign of life. Croft and I stared, wordlessly, wildly, all the world silent about us in the light of the morning sun.

Penalty

By CRISTEL HASTINGS

Veiled was the moon and gray the sea,
And white was the thing that stared at me,
For a dead man hung on a gallows tree—
Veiled was the moon and gray the sea.

Black was the hood they tied on his head
As he woke from sleep and left his bed,
Within that dread hour to hang dead—
Black was the hood they tied on his head.

Still was the room where the hangman stood
As quietly as a hangman could,
And little there seemed in this world of good—
Still was the room where the hangman stood.

Loud was the voice of the wind outside
Where trees bent low and a raging tide
Sobbed because a man had died—
Loud was the voice of the wind outside.

Dark is the room where the gallows stood,
Empty the limp and tear-wet hood,
And little is left in the night of good—
Dark is the room where the gallows stood.

"Petrified with terror, the bootlegger crouched over the open case. Moore whipped out his revolver."

The Phantom Hand

By VICTOR ROUSSEAU

An astounding novel of Black Magic, eery murders, and weird occult happenings

The Story Thus Far

DON WENTWORTH, engaged in the endeavor to clear the name of Senator Lemuel West, who was hanged for murder, has fallen into the power of the master of Black Magic, Godfrey Moore, as well as Lorna West, whom Moore snatched from him on the very evening of their wedding.

Moore has drawn Don's astral from his body, and compelled it to go to the apartment of Abner Wells, and kill him. Wells has been Moore's chief agent in his schemes, and is in possession of evidence that would send Moore to the gallows.

Now Abner Wells lies dead in his apartment, slain by the psychic force with which Don's astral had been charged by

This story began in WEIRD TALES for July

Moore, and Don and Lorna lie, to all appearance inanimate, in Moore's country house among the swamps of the Gulf Coast.

Moore plans to restore Don to life and let him be arrested for the murder of Wells. Don's sole hope lies in Sudh Hafiz, a Persian, who was sent by the master of White Magic, in Persia, to end Moore's criminal career. Sudh Hafiz witnesses Wells's death, and Wells's death-scream arouses everybody in the apartment house.

The story continues:

QUICKLY Sudh Hafiz left the apartment. He went down, not by the elevator, but by the stairs, to find the desk clerk and the elevator boys gathered in panic, and staring up through the shafts.

"What's the matter?" asked the Persian.

"That cry—didn't you hear it?"

"I heard a cry," replied Sudh Hafiz.

And he passed rapidly out of the building, while down the stairs the frightened tenants began to run, anxiously inquiring of one another where the cry had come from. Men and women huddled together in a terrified cluster, for every one had recognized that that cry had been the cry of death.

"The lights! What's the matter with the lights?" they shouted.

The lights in the apartment hall were burning dim, so dim that now the group could barely distinguish one another's faces.

The desk clerk was the first to recover his self-possession. He snatched up the transmitter. "Police headquarters, quick!" he shouted. "This is the Randolph apartment house. Something's happened here. We think some one's been murdered, and the lights are going out. All right, I'll see to it!"

He turned. "Don't let any one leave the building till the police come!" he shouted. "See that the rear entrance is guarded!" He had forgotten Sudh Hafiz.

Something was moving among the huddled guests, who were increasing in numbers every moment as more and more came running down the stairs. "Who's that? Stop him! Who is it? He's making for the door!"

But who can hold a shadow? Dimly they could see the outlines of a man's figure, weaving through the crowd, so easily, as if it were impalpable. They tried to grasp it, and their hands closed on emptiness. Now he was nearing the door, and now he was at the door, and still he evaded them.

"Hold him!"

"Here he is!"

A score of hands, stretched forth, encountered — nothing! The shadow was disappearing through the doorway, into the dark street.

"Stop him! There he goes!"

A policeman came running up, blowing his whistle as he ran. "Get back!" he shouted.

"That man! He's the murderer! There he goes! No! Where? Where?"

Blocking the doorway, they strained their eyes, trying to locate the vanished figure.

"There's no one left the house," said the officer scornfully. "You're seein' things!"

"I know that man! I recognized him!" shouted one of the tenants. "He's Donald Wentworth, the fellow who married Lem West's daughter last night. Abner Wells gave evidence against old Lem. That fellow pretended to be off on his honeymoon—and he came back to kill!"

IN THE Holy of Holies, a small, circular room in the dome of the great Babist temple, Sudh Hafiz kneeled. He was again in communion with his Master in the monastery in remote Persia.

With bowed head, he listened to the inaudible blessing pronounced by the great seer, one of that long line of prophets of all nations, that has never become extinct. Always there is one of the great brotherhood on earth to continue the teaching that all humanity is one.

"Thou has done well, my son," came the words. "Now there remaineth for thee only the bitterness of death to face, and that shall taste sweeter than honey on thy lips, for it is the death of martyrdom, in which the outer senses are sealed, and the inner ones are opened. Have no more fears.

"In a little while the call shall come. Meanwhile, abide in thine house in peace and serenity. Thy work is ended, and there is naught more for thee to do."

Calmly Sudh Hafiz rose to his feet and left the temple. He went into the house adjoining. Momentarily he expected the police to arrive and arrest him for the murder of Abner Wells.

This seemed a foregone conclusion. Sudh Hafiz did not realize that Moore, in separating Don's astral from his body, had involuntarily left a small modicum of the physical element attaching to it. It was only just enough to make the astral double visible to the untrained eye. That was why Don's shadow had been seen by the crowd in the hallway of the apartment house.

Sudh Hafiz himself, by virtue of his initiation and the opening of the inner senses, was able to discern the astral counterpart of all living things. On this account it did not occur to him that Don's shadow might have been perceptible to others than himself.

He called the Persian boy. "My end is at hand," he told him. "Go quickly to the rug-dealer on Fourth Street, who has orders to secrete thee and later to send thee back to our country. We meet no more this side of the grave."

"Master!" The boy flung himself upon his knees, caught Sudh Hafiz's hand, and pressed it to his lips. The tears were streaming down his face. "Let me die with you, Master!"

Sudh Hafiz smiled, luminously, compassionately. "Hast thou not understood? Have I not told thee a hundred times what was to come, Firdausi," he asked, "and that it would come swift as a flash of summer lightning?"

"Aye, Master, but I love you and I can not bear to be apart from you."

"Thou shalt never be apart from me while life endures, my son," replied the other. "Have this for thy consolation. At home the Master hath work for thee, as he hath had work for me."

When the weeping boy had gone, Sudh Hafiz sat waiting. He knew that he himself, since he had been shown up to Wells's apartment just before the death-scream, should be the person logically sought for the murder. It had happened, however, that the desk clerk who had telephoned up to the apartment when he arrived had immediately after gone off duty, so that no one in the apartment house was aware that it was he who had walked up the stairs to see Abner Wells.

Since there were no signs of the advent of the police, Sudh Hafiz drew out a sheet of writing-paper and began a letter.

MEANWHILE the news of Abner's murder was rapidly circulating through the city. Coming so quickly after the mysterious disappearance of Walstein—for the dead body of the political boss had not yet been discovered in the lonely hut beside the sea—it aroused intense excitement, coupled with a wild demand for vengeance.

The door of the apartment had been forced by the police, and Abner had been

discovered, lying upon the floor, dead, in a pool of blood. His skull appeared to have been crushed in with some heavy implement like a hammer.

The fact that Wells had met his death in precisely the same manner as Police Captain Morse intensified the popular anger. Abner Wells had posed as a reformer, and certainly nobody had attempted to unmask him, since he was very useful in that guise to the corrupt political party with which he was in alliance. There were few who knew the man as he had been.

It was generally believed, therefore, that he had met his death, like Captain Morse, because he was in possession of certain information that would send some of the political leaders to the penitentiary, or even to the gallows.

Within fifteen minutes an enraged mob was forming in the streets, and orators were shouting from soap-boxes, inciting them to obtain immediate revenge upon Abner's murderers. It was a scene that would have gratified Abner's sardonic soul, if he could have been there to see. Perhaps he was.

When the name of Don Wentworth began to be bruited about, an immediate search for him began. But here the mob and the police were baffled. Don had not been well known in Cannonville prior to his departure for China; he had been away some time, and his return had passed unheralded by the press. In fact, he had seen no one with the exception of the superintendent of the apartment house in which Senator West had lived.

The mystification grew greater when the Reverend Mr. Suydam stated that he had married Don and Lorna on the preceding evening. He was shrewd enough not to mention that the marriage had taken place at Sudh Hafiz's house, since he was fond of the Persian and did not want him brought into the matter in the present excited state of public opinion. He left the inference that the wedding had taken place in his own house.

Loudly asseverating Don's innocence, he stated that by this time he was miles away from Cannonville. Nobody knew of Don's visit to Moore's house, or dreamed that he was there at present, an involuntary guest of the black magician.

Meanwhile a shrewd newspaper man, who was one of the first to enter Abner Wells's apartment, had promptly discovered the papers that Abner had taken from his safe. A hasty glance at them, while the police were looking at the body, convinced him that they contained evidence enough to vindicate the name of Lemuel West, and to send Moore to the gallows as the real originator of the murder of Captain Morse.

This was too knotty a problem for him to solve unaided. He took them to his chief, who, recognizing their value, and himself afraid to publish them on the instant, determined to wait upon developments.

Developments came quickly. The desk clerk, who had gone home to bed, aroused by his wife with the information that the police wanted him, dressed and hurried downstairs. His statement that Sudh Hafiz had been in Abner Wells's apartment at the very time of the murder threw a fresh light upon the situation. He also recalled that Sudh Hafiz and Don had visited Abner Wells's apartment in the company of the dead man the evening before.

He added that Wells's look had been extremely agitated as the three entered the apartment house.

Somebody overheard the statement and communicated it to the crowd. Within two minutes an infuriated mob was

streaming along the road toward the temple.

But the house next door was lighted, and the amazed mob saw Sudh Hafiz himself, seated calmly at his desk, a cigarette between his lips, while he wrote a last letter of farewell to his mother in Persia.

Sudh Hafiz had just finished it when he heard the yells of the mob sweeping around the corner of the block. He addressed the envelope hastily, sealed it, and placed it in a drawer of the desk. That letter might never reach his mother—but that was part of the sacrifice. Sudh Hafiz was content.

The door broke down under the blows of the mob before he could reach it to open it. He was struck and kicked, knocked all but senseless, dragged out into the street. The mob howled for a rope.

They dragged him, unresisting, through the streets toward a little park and propped him up against an electric light pole. They surrounded him, baying like wild beasts. Men came running from a near-by garage, trailing a long towing-rope. Sudh Hafiz, barely conscious, his face disfigured from the blows he had received, and streaming blood, remained so calm that those immediately about him experienced a revulsion of awe, but the bulk of the mob grew even more infuriated.

"String him up!"

"Burn him!"

"Make him confess first!"

"String him up and get it over!"

Sudh Hafiz was stood upon his feet and a loop of the rope fastened about his neck, the other end being fastened about the transverse arm of the pole. In another moment he would have been hoisted. But at this juncture a body of policemen appeared on the run, shooting their revolvers over the heads of the mob, which dispersed in a moment. Sudh Hafiz was freed of the rope and dragged away to the lock-up, outside which the mob reassembled, howling for his blood.

Meanwhile the city was being scoured for Don. It was believed that he was in hiding somewhere close by the apartment house. Wires had been dispatched to all towns within a radius of three hundred miles, and the telephone wires were humming with inquiries, but all the answers were to the same effect. Neither Don nor Lorna had been seen by any one, and it was positive that Sudh Hafiz's car had not passed through any of those places. As a matter of fact, it was at the moment resting in Godfrey Moore's garage.

The detectives attempted to elicit information of Don's whereabouts from Sudh Hafiz, but he was unconscious, having been stunned by a stone hurled at him at the moment when he was being rushed into the lock-up. His finger prints were taken, however, for comparison with those that had been discovered on the table in Wells's apartment.

In his Akashic mirror, in the little room off the light room, Godfrey Moore saw all that was going on in Cannonville, and chuckled. He had not planned that Sudh Hafiz should be involved in the affair, but if the Persian was to be inculpated too, it suited him very well. That meant the destruction of the last of his enemies. He knew that the finger prints left by Don's astral would be in every respect identical with those left by the living man. And the explosion of psychic force that had killed Abner Wells as if by a hammer blow, had imprinted Don's finger prints upon the table as the astral rested its hand there for a moment.

All that remained now was to turn Don loose, so that he might be picked up.

And Lorna, too. She would be taken to the State Asylum, and thus the last of Moore's difficulties would be disposed of.

The only thing that troubled Moore was that the Akashic mirror refused to show him anything of the future. The moment that the hair-line dividing future from present was passed, it blurred. However, this was often the case when wills were in strong conflict. And Moore had no need to know the future, since the present indicated it decisively. There seemed no way in which Don could escape his doom.

He went into the light-room, on the floor of which lay Don and Lorna, each with the same waxen look of death upon the features. To restore astral to body required a reversal of the process that had separated it. Once more Moore flung the switch that admitted the intensely penetrating rays through the long prism. But this time it was only the healing rays, the ultra-violet, violet, and indigo that were admitted to play upon the bodies of the two.

Since a tenuous thread still bound the astral to the body, even though it was infinitely extensible, the astral would respond to the bodily treatment and be attracted back to its earthly habitation.

To Don, everything that had passed since the shock of disembodiment had been a vague dream. No astral counterpart, save that of an Initiate, is capable of taking stock of itself and realizing its whereabouts within the first few days after it has been withdrawn from the physical form with which it has been associated since birth and before.

Don was aware that some fearful shock had happened to him, and that his every thought had somehow peopled the void with corresponding phantoms. But the interview with Sudh Hafiz through the mediumship of the Persian boy had seemed a dream. So, too, the killing of Abner Wells.

Don had thought he was in a troubled nightmare, in which Moore had been commanding that he kill Abner with a hammer. He had appealed for aid to Sudh Hafiz, and, to his intense astonishment, the Persian had confirmed Moore's order. The very thought had carried his astral unwittingly to Wells's apartment. Moore had done the rest; Don had no idea that Wells was dead.

Now, as the healing rays began to play upon his body, Don felt like a man beginning to awaken. And with that restoration, memory began to return to him. First of all memories was that of Lorna. Gradually she began to take form in his mind. Then he recalled his having discovered her in Moore's house, and the incidents that followed, culminating in their marriage in Sudh Hafiz's house.

The remembrance that Lorna was his wife quickened the return of double to body, though as a matter of fact the final act was a matter of less than a second. Godfrey Moore, smiling grimly, saw Don stir and open his eyes. He shut off the light and, picking him up, carried him into the drawing-room, where he laid him down upon a lounge. Lorna, who had already come back to consciousness, he had already carried upstairs.

He grinned again as he saw Don look vacantly about him. It had all been so easy. Don would be so grateful at having his wife restored to him that he would make no trouble. And the two would be arrested before they had gone more than a few miles from his house in any direction.

Don's eyes lit upon his. There was intelligence in them now; Don remembered. Moore assumed an air of bland politeness, and anticipated Don's first stuttering words with a speech of his own.

"Well, Wentworth, my dear fellow, I'm glad to see you coming back. You certainly had a narrow escape."

"Where's Lorna, you—you——" But the epithet stopped short upon Don's lips. He was not quite sure yet how much was truth and how much dream. He remembered that Lorna had disappeared out of the car on their wedding evening; he recalled that wild drive of his through the pines to Moore's house, and the taunting challenge Moore had hurled at him. He seemed to remember some experiment of which Moore had made him the victim. But that might have been imagination.

And how did he know that Moore had kidnapped Lorna?

Moore saw his hesitation, and continued suavely:

"Your wife is here, upstairs, my dear fellow. She seems to have had one of her periodical attacks of mental weakness, and slipped out of your car when you halted by the wayside. She came here, hardly knowing what she was doing, seeking the place where she had been cared for as unconsciously and instinctively as the bird seeks its home.

"You followed her on the chance. You supposed I had in some way got her away from you—a causeless supposition, but I can make full allowance for a man whose bride of an hour had just left him. You came here—this was last night—and—well, my dear fellow, you were temporarily bereft of reason.

"I was forced to administer a sedative in the form of one of the new chloroform derivatives, which produces instant unconsciousness. You have just awakened. That is the long and short of it. Lorna has now recovered; she is lying down upstairs, and you are at perfect liberty to take her away and resume your wedding journey. I must warn you, however, that it will be necessary to take the greatest care of her, that the physician has warned me that these attacks are liable to recur, at any rate for some time to come."

Don glared at him. He was still weak, but his strength was swiftly coming back to him. He knew the man was lying, but he couldn't quite pin him down to anything. Also he knew that in his dreams he had been at Moore's mercy. But, again, he couldn't bring forward such an allegation as that.

Moore knew that he knew, and smiled. He was enjoying the situation.

"I'll see my wife," said Don.

"You certainly shall, my dear fellow," answered Moore. He rose. "If you'll stay where you are, and rest comfortably, I'll bring her down to you."

Don rose weakly. "I don't trust you, Moore," he said, "and I know you've been lying to me. If you've got any tricks in mind——"

Moore elevated his eyebrows in a well-bred manner. "Rather strong language, my dear fellow," he answered. "However, I can make allowance for your state of mind. And, as we are not likely to meet again——"

"Bring me my wife," said Don, facing Moore with such a look of cold fury that Moore retreated a step or two in uncertainty.

"You shall see her in one minute, Wentworth," he answered, and left the room. But as he reached the entrance hall Don heard another man stamping across the floor, heard him address Moore, and Moore's gasp of surprize and rage.

"I got that stuff of yours outside, Mr. Moore," he heard the newcomer say in a strong Italian accent.

"What stuff are you talking about?" cried Moore. "And who the devil are you?"

"Beg pardon, Mr. Moore," returned

the other. "I'm one of Mr. Moroni's fellers. Tony and me, we been running some cases of gin along the coast, and only just landed. He's gone on to Mr. Moroni's place near here. Funny thing, but there was a foreign feller, sort of Turk or Arab from the look of him, waiting for us when we landed. Tony and me thought he was a dick, and we'd have bumped him off, but there was something about that guy stopped us shooting. Maybe we thought he was a priest—he'd a sort of look like that about him.

"He said to us how you'd ordered a case of champagne from Mr. Moroni what hadn't been delivered, and you was mad about it because you was having a party, and I told him I remembered something about it, and we had a couple of cases in the boat. I told him I'd bring it right up to you, while Tony went on to Mr. Moroni's place. And say, that feller vanished like he might have been a ghost. Yeah, it gave me a scare, Mr. Moore.

"I got your case outside. Didn't seem to weigh nothing when I carried it, but I guess it ain't empties for all that. I'll bring it in for you."

Godfrey Moore glared murderously at the intruder. That chance intervention had ruined all his well-laid plans, for Don and the newcomer had already seen each other. This witness to Don's presence in Moore's house would automatically create for Don a perfect alibi.

"Just wait outside, and I'll be with you in a few minutes," he said, and turned and went upstairs. Don, who saw nothing unusual in the interview, stood alone in the hall until Moore came down the stairs again, escorting Lorna.

She was leaning heavily upon his arm. She looked white as a ghost and utterly fatigued, but at the sight of Don a cry of gladness broke from her lips, and she came running down the stairs toward him.

Her arms went round his neck, and he was holding her, for the moment oblivious of Moore's presence.

"Don, dear, my dearest, forgive me!" she wept. "I don't remember anything that happened after we started on our wedding journey, and then I awoke just now and found myself in Mr. Moore's home. He told me I—I had an attack of my old illness, and ran away and came to him. Oh, forgive me, dearest Don, and don't turn from me!"

"Turn from you, Lorna? I'm ready to take you away right on the moment. We'll just continue our trip."

"Yes, I think that's best," said Moore in his bland way. "You'll find your car in the garage, Wentworth. Under ordinary circumstances I should ask you to wait a little until you were both feeling better, but in view of——"

"Exactly," answered Don. "We'll bid you good-bye." And, drawing Lorna's arm through his, he walked out of the house.

"WE GOT him dead to rights!" The detective waved the photographic film exultantly. "They're his finger prints, and there ain't no doubt about it. But keep it from the crowd, sheriff. That's the ugliest-lookin' mob I ever seen."

The sheriff looked out at the mob that filled the street, yelling for vengeance upon the prisoner. "Reckon me and my two deputies can't hold 'em if they start ructions," he muttered dismally.

"That's why I'm tellin' yuh to keep it dark about them finger prints, sheriff," replied the detective.

Unfortunately the horse was already out of the stable; in other words, the finger-print expert's assistant had already chattered, and the news had circulated through the crowd.

For ten minutes the yells increased, until they rose into a frightful uproar. Then a new movement was discernible in the crowd. It parted, and eight men appeared, bearing a ponderous beam.

"Open up, sheriff!" they shouted through the small barred window. "We're goin' to take him, and the quicker you give him up, the better."

The sheriff's answer was inaudible in the din, but his gesture indicated that it was a refusal. Next moment the beam swung ponderously against the heavy door of the jail.

It cracked and splintered. From the jail window the sheriff and his two deputies covered the beam-bearers with their revolvers, but instantly a score of revolvers were covering them. They hesitated, and were lost. Again the beam swung, and again. The door broke inward, sagged on its upper hinges, and went down. Yelling, the mob swarmed into the jail entrance.

The sheriff was quickly overpowered and his keys were taken from him. In a few moments the cell was unlocked, and Sudh Hafiz dragged out.

Still half unconscious from his blows, his face covered with matted blood, he looked so helpless that the fury of the mob, always keenest against the defenseless, rose to the point of mania. It took all the persuasions of the ringleaders to prevent them from kicking Sudh Hafiz to death then and there.

He was dragged out of the jail and back through the streets to the little park. The halter was again placed about his neck. A man stepped forward and prodded him viciously in the stomach.

"You're going to die, dago," he sneered. "Them finger prints in Mr. Well's apartment was yours, and the photos to prove it. If you want to ease your miserable soul by confessin', now's your time."

A great joy, a great peace came into Sudh Hafiz's eyes, and he smiled slightly, to the amazement of the bloodthirsty throng gathered about him. His lips moved slightly, as if in prayer.

"Master, I thank thee," he was whispering. "Never in all the world were two men born with identical finger prints before. I hardly believed when thou didst tell me."

But the Master in the Persian monastery was silent, for at the supreme crisis each man must face his destiny alone.

"Yes," said Sudh Hafiz clearly, to the crowd, "I killed Abner Wells." Which was probably the whitest lie that was ever told.

Next moment a score of men were pulling upon the rope. But before the dangling body reached the level of the horizontal arm it was already inanimate, done to death by a dozen revolver bullets that had pierced heart and brain and body.

THE police had abandoned their efforts to save Sudh Hafiz. There was bigger work afoot, for the editor of the newspaper, his chief, and the police chief had been closeted together for the past half-hour, going through Abner Wells's papers.

"Chief," said the publisher, "I'm talking frankly to you. These letters are going to be published this afternoon, and they'll prove a political sensation of the first magnitude. We've had the goods on Godfrey Moore for a long time past. When the public learns of this conspiracy that sent Lemuel West to the gallows, an innocent man, it's going to send Moore to the gallows and sweep the present municipal government out of power in Cannonville.

"Here's your chance to take the lead. It'll mean a high post for you in the next administration. If you don't do it, you'll share the odium and probably face criminal charges. What are you going to do?"

"No need to threaten me," answered the police chief sourly. "I'm appointed to preserve law and order, and run down guilty parties, and what you've shown me is enough to hang Godfrey Moore three times over. I'll get him."

"Best get him quick," said the publisher. "He's a slippery customer."

"Trust me. And now I'm goin' to ask something of you, Mr. Hammond. I'm takin' a force of a dozen cops out to Moore's place while the crowd's doin' that dervish dance round Hafiz's body. We're goin' out by the back road in a coupla private cars. Not a word to nobody. Never see such a town for leaks as this one."

"I'll take you up on that," replied the other. "But I'll ask you to 'phone in to me as soon as you've got Moore under arrest. Benson will write the story, and we'll have it set up by three of our most trusted men, and we'll hold the afternoon edition until I get word from you. We'll play you up too. I guess you'll find it'll be the best day's work you've ever done."

"I ain't thinkin' of myself," answered the chief of police. "I always had my doubts about Lem West bein' guilty. It looked like a frame-up to me. If it hadn't been Captain Morse who was bumped off, I might have put up a fight for him. But the force was so ravin' mad, Lem never had a chance from the beginnin'. Say, ain't it queer that Persian, Sudh Hafiz, was workin' in Moore's int'rests?"

"Well, Moore gave a big sum toward the temple," answered the newspaper publisher, "and I guess he had Sudh Hafiz where he wanted him."

"Sure, sure," agreed the chief of police. "There ain't no doubt he killed Wells. Finger prints don't lie. And that stuff about seein' Don Wentworth was just the bunk, like I thought. But there's something queer behind it all, and mark my words, some day it'll come out."

While the lifeless body of Sudh Hafiz dangled from the electric light pole, and the mob danced a wild dervish fling about it, two private cars, each holding a half-dozen police officers in plain clothes, rushed out along the back road in the direction of Godfrey Moore's house. At the moment of their departure Don was just beginning to come back to life under Moore's ministrations.

GODFREY MOORE waited till Don and Lorna had disappeared into the garage, which stood some little distance away from the house. Then he beckoned to Moroni's aide, who had been standing, waiting patiently.

"Bring your stuff inside," he commanded curtly.

"Jest a minute, boss," answered the Italian, grinning. He disappeared in the direction of a clump of bushes, and emerged in a minute, carrying the case on his shoulder. He brought it into the house and set it down.

"I jest can't make it out, boss," he said. "This here don't weigh no more than a coupla empty bottles, but I guess it's the stuff all right. Still, I'd like to open it to make sure. Mr. Moroni would be mad at me if I delivered you a case of empties, and accidents do happen now and again."

"Don't worry about what Mr. Moroni's likely to think," replied Godfrey. "However, you can open it if you like, to make sure. But bring it into the drawing-room."

The bootlegger had already produced a chisel, and now, carrying the case from the hall into the drawing-room, he set it

down. Meanwhile, Moore's mind was working with feverish activity.

He knew that the presence of this man had nullified his whole cleverly conceived scheme to send Don to the gallows. It was not conceivable that Don could have been in Cannonville at the time of Wells's murder, and have got back to his own house at the time of the bootlegger's arrival. True, the psychic finger prints would practically establish Don's presence in Wells's apartment. But Don had been there with Sudh Hafiz the night before, and it might reasonably be contended that he had left them on that occasion.

Well, there was only one way out of the dilemma.

Godfrey Moore watched the Italian chiselling up the lid of the case. It was open now, and he reached in and pulled out a bottle of champagne.

"You see she's full, boss," he said.

"Yes," stalled Godfrey Moore. He was waiting for the sound of the engine starting, which would afford him his opportunity. "How'd you feel about a drink?" he asked the Italian amiably.

"Why, say, boss, I don't never turn down an offer like that. But you ain't got no tumbler here."

"Never mind; knock off the neck of the bottle and drink out of it," commanded Moore.

The other looked at him in surprize, and then, with a shrug of his shoulders, tapped with the chisel around the protruding portion of the neck, struck a sharp blow, and the top of the bottle came off clean. A spurt of champagne went over the floor.

"Never mind, never mind!" said Moore. And at that moment he heard the sound of Don's engine starting.

The Italian raised the bottle to his lips. Moore, standing slightly behind him, saw him staring into the corner in a puzzled way. "What's the matter?" he asked.

"That Arab feller! There he is! What's he doin' in here? Why don't he speak? Gawd, he's got a rope round his neck!"

Petrified with terror, the bootlegger remained crouching over the opened case, the bottle in his hand, while he stared into a corner of the room.

Godfrey Moore whipped out the revolver from his pocket, placed it to the back of the man's head, and fired. Without a sound he dropped in an inanimate heap, the bottle falling to the floor and deluging the rug with wine.

In the garage Don's engine was sputtering. Moore quickly replaced the revolver in his pocket, seized the dead man by the head and shoulders, and dragged him across the floor, and through the two smaller drawing-rooms and along the passage into the light-room.

He unlocked the door at the end, and entered the short tunnel. In this there was a cunningly devised trap which opened upon a vault below. The vault was a natural one and extensive. It had been the scene of many an unhallowed orgy in the days of the Obeah worship, and later, when Godfrey Moore had pursued his investigations into Black Magic there.

Things had happened there which even Moore, hardened though he was, did not like to remember. And of these the sacrifice of helpless human beings, lured into the depths of the pine forests, had not been the most horrible. That vault knew the Black Mass, with all its abominations; it was a center of devil-worship, and, too, a receptacle for the bodies of the slain.

The trap consisted of a natural phenomenon which had, perhaps, at first led to the use of the place for such obscene purposes. It was nothing less than a rocking-stone that had fallen from the

roof above; a boulder several tons in weight, yet poised so lightly over the trap that it could be moved back on its base with one hand, while a team of horses could hardly have dragged it out of position. In place, it completely concealed the vault underneath.

Holding the dead man by the hair, Moore pushed back the stone and dropped his inanimate burden into the depths below. He waited till he heard the faint thud of the body striking the rock floor, then replaced the stone and went back.

From the other end of the tunnel a pair of beady eyes watched him, and the slit of a monkey-mouth was curved in infinite derision. It was the hideous negress, mumbling as she crouched, like a great ape, among the rocks.

Moore went back. In the light-room he inspected himself carefully. There was no speck of blood upon his clothes—he had been careful of that. But in the drawing-room the rug was blood-stained, and he rolled it up and thrust it beneath the sofa. In a few minutes he would go back to the vault and fling the rug after the dead man. But just now he heard Don's car backing out of the garage, and, going to a side window, he saw Don at the wheel, straightening the machine upon the concrete road, while his right arm was about Lorna, whose head rested upon his shoulder.

A bitter smile curled Moore's lips. "They'll get him before he's gone a mile, whichever way he goes," he muttered. The sight of the love-making caused him to search his soul. Was it worth it, all that he had acquired at the cost of the ordinary human emotions, at the cost of a loved companion along the road of life?

Yes, it was worth it, he decided. Even as the Master had told Sudh Hafiz, there was no progress except by sacrifice, whether that progress was upward or downward.

Gleefully he watched the car start along the road and disappear among the pines. He had Don where he wanted him now. His travails and tribulations were at an end. Moroni, Walstein, Abner Wells were dead, and with Don's execution all evidence against him would be obliterated.

THE sound of shots, yells among the pines startled Moore for a moment. Then, with a grim smile, he left the house and hurried along the road. It was awkward that the search-party should have come upon Don so close to his house, but he would resolutely deny that Don had been his guest. Even if Lorna backed Don up in such a statement, there would be the damning finger prints.

What easier than to say that Don must have been hiding with Lorna in the swamps, after making a hurried getaway from the scene of the murder?

The shots were not repeated, but the yells sounded louder as Moore ran from the house. Rounding the curve of the road, he saw two cars drawn across the concrete close beside Don's, and a number of men in civilian clothes swarming about it.

Not policemen! Just a posse of amateurs, thought Moore. It was all easy, easy, if he kept his head.

And he moved at a fast but not undignified gait in the direction of the hold-up.

The shots had been fired over the approaching car, as a signal to halt. When Don slowed down, the police officers rushed forward, gesturing to him to throw up his hands.

"You're Wentworth?" demanded the chief of police. "Say, where you been since you left Cannonville night before last?"

Don told him that he had started with Lorna on their wedding-trip, that Lorna

had been mentally afflicted, and had wandered away to Godfrey Moore's house; that he had followed her there and had been drugged or anesthetized by Moore; that he had recovered consciousness only a half-hour before, and that Moore had sent him and Lorna away.

"I don't know what game that man's been playing, but I think he'll stand watching," he added.

"More than watching," said the chief of police. "D'you know Abner Wells is dead?"

Don's exclamation of genuine surprize was convincing enough under the circumstances.

"Yeah, murdered by that Persian feller. He's just been lynched."

Don cried out in horror. "Sudh Hafiz?" he shouted. "Why, he's a saint!"

"Oh yeah? Well, we'll find out why he did it later, maybe. Anyway, he left his finger prints behind him, and he was in Wells's apartment at the time of Wells's death. To be frank, you was under suspicion, Mr. Wentworth. Some feller thought he saw you. But Sudh Hafiz confessed, and that lets you out all right. Besides, we happen to know——"

He broke off. Godfrey Moore was approaching rapidly. The police chief nodded to his men and spoke a few words quickly. Don, paralyzed with horror at the news of the Persian's fate, watched Moore approaching.

Moore broke into a run. "You've got him?" he cried, pointing to Don. "That's your man! He must have been hiding out in the swamps! I saw him driving by with that girl just now, then I heard the shots and hurried up to you."

"Oh yeah?" sneered the police chief. "Well, it happens you're the man we're after, Moore. Throw up your hands! We got the goods on you!"

In a moment Godfrey Moore was in the hands of the police and his revolver taken from him. Protests of bland astonishment poured from his lips unheeded.

"We takin' him back to town, Chief?" asked the officer's principal deputy.

"Take him back to his house first," answered the police chief. "Maybe we'll find some evidence there, though we've got enough to hang him."

"You'll pay for this," snarled Moore through livid lips. "This is going to cost you your job, you fool, and then I'm going to sue you for false arrest and——"

"You're wastin' breath, Moore," answered the other. "We got the goods on you. Abner Wells left enough papers to hang you for framin' Lemuel West."

Moore relapsed into silence. He couldn't understand.

"Bring him inside, two of you," commanded the chief. "The rest of you spread through the house and see if there's anything worth reportin'."

He beckoned to two of the policemen, who, escorting Moore between them, followed the chief. And at that moment Moore made his last desperate bid for freedom. Outside the drawing-room he dived suddenly and rushed through the blue velvet portieres. One of the detectives, following him, slipped on a rug and went down, his companion falling over him.

Police Chief Morton drew his gun swiftly and fired, but the bullet went wide; and now Moore was in the last of the drawing-rooms; and now he was in the corridor and racing for the door of the light-room, and tugging at the key of the farther door as he ran. Another bullet slammed into the light-room door beside his head as he ran, but he gained the room and slammed the door behind him.

No time to stop to lock that one. The door leading into the tunnel was before him. He darted through and inserted the

key into the lock on the other side. He fumbled desperately, hearing Morton hard upon his heels. But then Morton struck the long prism and fell in a cataract of broken glass, and Moore was in the tunnel.

A touch of his hand displaced the rocking-stone. Beneath it was a steep ramp, upon which Moore dropped. He clung to it, half-way between the stone above and the vault beneath, hearing the frantic efforts of the police to break down the door.

It went down with a crash at last, and he heard their voices in the tunnel. He heard their shouts of surprize as they discovered the opening on the other side, the pine forests and the group of negro huts.

He heard them coming back a long time later.

"Yeah, he's got away, boys," he heard Morton say, "but we'll comb them woods for him. He can't go far."

Much later he crawled to the top of the ramp and tried the stone. But it was impossible to get sufficient purchase on it from below, and he resigned himself to awaiting the black woman's coming. All this had been foreseen and discussed between them at a long antecedent date.

And later still, when Moore had lost all count of time, he heard her whispered chuckle overhead.

"Dat you, Massa?"

"It's me, Mam. Are the cops gone?"

"Dey're gone, Massa."

"Move back the stone!" commanded Moore.

"Massa not understand. Dat stone Obeah stone. Obeah put the mark of death on Massa. Comes now, now, Massa!" A fiendish chuckle came from the creature overhead. "Mamaloi! Mamaloi! Death comes now, death!" she shrieked.

"Mam, you black devil, if you don't roll back this stone——" shrieked Godfrey Moore.

Those were the last words ever heard from his lips. What was the secret of the rocking-stone, or how many times its victims had been trapped in just that way, only the black crone knew. Slowly it moved forward, gathered impetus, dropped and was wedged firmly into the orifice, a twelve-ton mass that none would stir until the Judgment Day.

"I DON'T believe it, dearest. Sudh Hafiz never killed Abner Wells, even though he is said to have confessed. Even though his finger prints were on that table, I'll never believe it."

Don sat with Lorna on a sunny beach a month after the tragedy. Events had quieted down in Cannonville. But they were never going back. They had already come to that decision. Lorna was convalescent now, and all the happenings of two months before had become dreamlike, even to Don.

Lemuel West's name had been cleared, Walstein's body discovered in the cabin, and only Godfrey Moore's disappearance still puzzled the police and public, most of the latter believing that he had managed to buy off justice and spirit himself away.

"But for Sudh Hafiz, your father's innocence would never have been established," said Don. "I believe that in some way he gave his life for me."

And, as he spoke, he seemed to see, faintly outlined against the sand, a shadowy form with hand outstretched in benediction. Imagination, of course; but for the moment Don had a clear consciousness of Sudh Hafiz's presence.

"It's getting cool, Lorna. We'd better go back to the hotel," said Don.

And arm in arm they walked back over the smooth sand, absorbed in each other.

[THE END]

The Supernumerary Corpse

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

Jasper Trilt was dead—but what was that thing in his likeness that lay supine on the floor of the laboratory?

IT IS not remorse that maddens me, that drives me to the penning of this more than indiscreet narrative, in the hope of finding a temporary distraction. I have felt no remorse for a crime to which justice itself impelled me. It is the damnable mystery, beyond all human reason or solution, upon which I have stumbled in the doing of this simple deed, in the mere execution of the justice whereof I speak—it is this that has brought me near to insanity.

My motives in the killing of Jasper Trilt, though imperative, were far from extraordinary. He had wronged me enough, in the course of a twelve years' acquaintance, to warrant his death twice over. He had robbed me of the painfully garnered fruits of a lifetime of labor and research, had stolen, with lying promises, the chemical formulæ that would have made me a wealthy man. Foolishly, I had trusted him, believing that he would share with me the profits of my precious knowledge—from which he was to acquire riches and renown. Poor and unknown, I could do nothing for my own redress.

Often I marvel at the long forbearance which I displayed toward Trilt. Something (was it the thought of ultimate revenge?) led me to ignore his betrayals, to dissemble my knowledge of his baseness. I continued to use the laboratory which he had equipped for me. I went on accepting the miserable pittance which he paid me for my toil. I made new discoveries—and I allowed him to cheat me of their usufruct.

Moreover, there was Norma Gresham, whom I had always loved in my halting, inarticulate fashion, and who had seemed to like me well enough before Trilt began to pay her his dashing and gallant addresses. She had speedily forgotten the timid, poverty-stricken chemist, and had married Trilt. This, too, I pretended to ignore, but I could not forget. . . . As you see, my grievances were such as have actuated many others in the seeking of vengeance: they were in no sense unusual; and like everything else about the affair, they served by their very commonplaceness to throw into monstrous relief the abnormal and inexplicable outcome.

I CAN not remember when it was that I first conceived the idea of killing my betrayer. It has been so long an integral part of my mental equipment, that I seem to have nurtured it from all pre-eternity. But the full maturing, the perfection of my murderous plans, is a thing of quite recent date.

For years, apart from my usual work, I had been experimenting with poisons. I delved in the remote arcana and by-ways of toxicology, I learned all that chemistry could tell me on the subject—and more. This branch of my research was wholly unknown to Trilt; and I did not intend that he should profit by anything that I had discovered or devised in the course

of my investigations. In fact, my aims were quite different, in regard to him.

From the beginning, I had in mind certain peculiar requisites, which no poison familiar to science could fulfil. It was after endless groping and many failures that I succeeded in formulating a compound of rare toxic agents which would have the desired effect on the human system.

It was necessary, for my own security, that the poison should leave no trace, and should imitate closely the effects of some well-known malady, thus precluding even the chance of medical suspicion. Also, the victim must not die too quickly and mercifully. I devised a compound which, if taken internally, would be completely absorbed by the nervous system within an hour and would thereafter be indetectable through analysis. It would cause an immediate paralysis, and would present all the outward effects of a sudden and lethal stroke of apoplexy. However, the afflicted person—though seemingly insensible—would retain consciousness and would not die till the final absorption of the poison. Though utterly powerless to speak or move, he would still be able to hear and see, to understand—and suffer.

Even after I had perfected this agent, and had satisfied myself of its efficacy, I delayed the crowning trial. It was not through fear or compunction that I waited: rather, it was because I desired to prolong the delicious joys of anticipation, the feeling of power it gave me to know that I could sentence my betrayer to his doom and could execute the sentence at will.

It was after many months—it was less than a fortnight ago—that I decided to withhold my vengeance no longer. I planned it all very carefully, with complete forethought; and I left no loophole for mischance or accident. There would be nothing, not even the most tenuous thread, that could ever lead any one to suspect me.

To arouse the cupidity of Trilt, and insure his profound interest, I went to him and hinted that I was on the brink of a great discovery. I did not specify its nature, saying that I should reveal it all at the proper time, when success had been achieved. I did not invite him to visit the laboratory. Cunningly, by oblique hints, I stimulated his curiosity; and I knew that he would come. Perhaps my caution was excessive; but it must not even seem that I had prearranged the visit that would terminate in his seizure and death. I could, perhaps, have found opportunity to administer the poison in his own home, where I was still a fairly frequent caller. But I wished him to die in my presence and in the laboratory that had been the scene of my long, defrauded toils.

I knew, by a sort of prescience, the very evening when he would come, greedy to unearth my new secret. I prepared the draft that contained the poison—a chemist's glass of water colored with a little grenadine—and set it aside in readiness among my tubes and bottles. Then I waited.

The laboratory—an old and shabby mansion converted by Trilt to this purpose—lay in a well-wooded outskirt of the town, at no great distance from my employer's luxurious home. Trilt was a gourmand; and I knew that he would not arrive till well after the dinner hour. Therefore I looked for him about nine o'clock. He must indeed have been eager to filch my supposed new formula; for, half an hour before the expected time, I heard his heavy, insolent knock on the door of the rear room in which I was waiting amid my chemical apparatus.

He came in, gross and odious, with the

purple overfeeding upon his puffy jowls. He wore an azure blue tie and a suit of pepper-and-salt—a close-fitting suit that merely emphasized the repulsive bulkiness of his figure.

"Well, Margrave, what is it now?" he asked. "Have you finished the experiments you were hinting about so mysteriously? I hope you've really done something to earn your pay, this time."

"I have made a tremendous discovery," I told him—"nothing less than the elixir of the alchemists—the draft of eternal life and energy."

He was palpably startled, and gave me a sharp, incredulous stare.

"You are lying," he said—"or fooling yourself. Every one knows, and has known since the Dark Ages, that the thing is a scientific impossibility."

"Others may lie," I said sardonically, "but it remains to be seen whether or not I have lied. That graduated glass which you see on the table is filled with the elixir."

He stared at the vessel which I had indicated.

"It looks like grenadine," he remarked, with a certain perspicacity.

"There is a superficial likeness—the color is the same. . . . But the stuff means immortality for any one who dares to drink it—also it means inexhaustible capacity for pleasure, a freedom from all satiety or weariness. It is everlasting life and joy."

He listened greedily. "Have you tried it yourself?"

"Yes, I have experimented with it," I countered.

He gave me a somewhat contemptuous and doubtful glance. "Well, you do look rather animated tonight—at least, more so than usual—and not so much like a mackerel that's gotten soured on life. The stuff hasn't killed you, at any rate. So I think I'll try it myself. It ought to be a pretty good commercial proposition, if it only does a tenth of what you say it will. We'll call it Trilt's Elixir."

"Yes," said I, slowly, echoing him: "Triit's Elixir."

He reached for the glass and raised it to his lips.

"You guarantee the result?" he asked.

"The result will be all that one could desire," I promised, looking him full in the eyes, and smiling with an irony which he could not perceive.

He drained the glass at a gulp. Instantly, as I had calculated, the poison took effect. He staggered as if he had received a sudden, crushing blow, the empty vessel fell from his fingers with a crash, his heavy legs collapsed beneath him, he fell on the laboratory floor between the laden benches and tables, and lay without stirring again. His face was flushed and congested, his breathing stertorous, as in the malady whose effects I had chosen to simulate. His eyes were open—horribly open and glaring; but there was not even the least flicker of their lids.

COOLLY, but with a wild exultation in my heart, I gathered up the fragments of the broken glass and dropped them into the small heating-stove that stood at the room's end. Then, returning to the fallen and helpless man, I allowed myself the luxury of gloating over the dark, unutterable terror which I read in his paralytic gaze. Knowing that he could still hear and comprehend, I told him what I had done and listed the unforgotten wrongs which he thought I had accepted so supinely.

Then, as an added torture, I emphasized the indetectable nature of the poison, and I taunted him for his own own folly in drinking the supposed elixir. All too quickly did the hour pass—the hour which

I had allowed for the full absorption of the poison and the victim's death. The breathing of Trilt grew slower and fainter, his pulse faltered and became inaudible; and at last he lay dead. But the terror still appeared to dwell, dark and stagnant and nameless, in his ever-open eyes.

Now, as was part of my carefully laid plan, I went to the laboratory telephone. I intended to make two calls—one, to tell Norma, Trilt's wife, of his sudden and fatal seizure while visiting me—and the other, to summon a doctor.

For some indefinable reason, I called Norma first—and the outcome of our conversation was so bewildering, so utterly staggering, that I did not put in the second call.

Norma answered the telephone herself, as I had expected. Before I could frame the few short words that would inform her of Trilt's death, she cried out in a shaken, tremulous voice:

"I was just going to call you, Felton. Jasper died a few minutes ago, from an apoplectic stroke. It's all so terrible, and I am stunned by the shock. He came into the house about an hour ago, and dropped at my feet without saying a word. . . . I thought he had gone to see you—but he could hardly have done that and gotten back so quickly. Come at once, Felton."

The dumfoundment which I felt was inexpressible. I think I must have stammered a little as I answered her:

"Are you sure — quite sure that it's Jasper?"

"Of course, it's incredible. But he is lying here on the library sofa—dead. I called a doctor when he was stricken; and the doctor is still here. But there is nothing more to be done."

It was impossible then for me to tell her, as I had intended—that Trilt had come to the laboratory—that his dead body was lying near me in the rear room at that moment. Indeed, I doubted my own senses, doubted my very brain, as I hung up the telephone. Either I, or Norma, was the victim of some strange and unaccountable delusion.

Half expecting that the gross cadaver would have vanished like an apparition, I turned from the telephone—and saw it, supine and heavy, with stiffening limbs and features. I went over, I stooped above it and dug my fingers roughly into the flabby flesh to make sure that it was real—that Trilt's visit and the administering of the poison had not been a mere hallucination. It was Trilt himself who lay before me: no one could mistake the obese body, the sybaritic face and lips, even with the chill of death descending upon them. The corpse I had touched was all too solid and substantial.

It must be Norma, then, who was demented or dreaming, or who had made some incredible mistake. I should go to the house at once and learn the true explanation. There would be time enough afterward to do my own explaining.

There was no likelihood that any one would enter the laboratory in my absence. Indeed, there were few visitors at any time. With one backward look at the body, to assure myself anew of its materiality, I went out into the moonless evening and started toward my employer's residence.

I HAVE no clear recollection of the short walk among shadowy trees and bushes and along the poorly litten streets with their scattered houses. My thoughts, as well as the external world, were a night-bound maze of baffling unreality and dubiety.

Into this maze I was plunged to an irremeable depth on my arrival. Norma, pale and stunned rather than grief-stricken (for I think she had long ceased to love Trilt), was at the door to meet me.

"I can't get over the suddenness of it," she said at once. "He seemed all right at dinnertime, and ate heartily, as usual. Afterward he went out, saying that he would walk as far as the laboratory and look in on you.

"He must have felt ill, and started back after he had gone half-way. I didn't even hear him come in. I can't understand how he entered the house so quietly. I was sitting in the library, reading, when I happened to look up, just in time to see him cross the room and fall senseless at my feet. He never spoke or moved after that."

I could say nothing as she led me to the library. I do not know what I had expected to find; but certainly no sane man, no modern scientist and chemist, could have dreamed of what I saw—the body of Jasper Trilt, reposing still and stiff and cadaverous on the sofa: the same corpse, to all outward seeming, which I had left behind me in the laboratory!

The doctor, Trilt's family physician, whom Norma had summoned, was about to leave. He greeted me with a slight nod and a cursory, incurious glance.

"There's nothing whatever to be done," he said—"it's all over."

"But—it doesn't seem possible," I stammered. "Is it really Jasper Trilt—isn't there some mistake?"

The doctor did not seem to hear my question. With reeling senses, doubting my own existence, I went over to the sofa and examined the body, touching it several times to make sure—if assurance were possible—of its substantiality. The puffy, purplish features, the open, glaring eyes with their glacial terror, the suit of pepper-and-salt, the azure blue tie—all were identical with those I had seen and touched a few minutes previous, in another place. I could no longer doubt the materiality of the second corpse—I could not deny that the thing before me, to all intents and purposes, was Jasper Trilt. But in the very confirmation of its incredible identity, there lay the inception of a doubt that was infinitely hideous. . . .

A WEEK has gone by since then—a week of unslumbering nightmare, of all-prevailing, ineluctable horror.

Going back to the laboratory, I found the corpse of Jasper Trilt on the floor, where he had fallen. Feverishly, I applied to it all possible tests: it was solid, clammy, gross, material, like the other. I dragged it into a dusty, little-used store-room, among cobwebby cartons and boxes and bottles, and covered it with sacking.

For reasons that must be more than obvious, I dared not tell any one of its existence. No one, save myself, has ever seen it. No one—not even Norma—suspects the unimaginable truth. . . .

Later, I attended the funeral of Trilt, I saw him in his coffin, and as one of the pall-bearers I helped to carry the coffin and lower it into the grave. I can swear that it was tenanted by an actual body. And on the faces of the morticians and my fellow pall-bearers there was no shadow of doubt or misgiving as to the identity and reality of the corpse. But afterward, returning home, I lifted the sacking in the store-room, and found that the thing beneath—cadaver or *ka, doppelgänger* or phantom, whatever it was—had not disappeared or undergone the least change.

Madness took me then for awhile, and I knew not what I did. Recovering my senses in a measure, I poured gallon after gallon of corrosive acids into a great tub; and in the tub I placed the thing that had been Jasper Trilt, or which bore the semblance of Trilt. But neither the clothing nor the body was affected in any degree by the mordant acid. And since then, the

thing has shown no sign of normal decay, but remains eternally and inexplicably the same. Some night, before long, I shall bury it in the woods behind the laboratory; and the earth will receive Trilt for the second time. After that, my crime will be doubly indetectable—if I have really committed a crime, and have not dreamed it all or become the victim of some hallucinative brain-disease.

I have no explanation for what has happened, nor do I believe that any such can be afforded by the laws of a sane universe. But—is there any proof that the universe itself is sane, or subject to rational laws?

Perhaps there are inconceivable lunacies in chemistry itself, and drugs whose action is a breach of all physical logic. The poison I administered to Trilt was an unknown quantity, apart from its deadliness, and I can not be wholly sure of its properties, of its possible effect on the atoms of the human body—and the atoms of the soul. Indeed, I can be sure of nothing, except that I too, like the laws of matter, must go altogether mad in a little while.

This Side of the Curtain

By RENIER WYERS

Stepping into traffic-crowded Fifth Avenue, Tom Atwell suddenly found himself swept into a strange place and a weird adventure

TOM ATWELL came through the revolving door, stepped a few paces across the polished floor, and then stood stock-still. He looked about him for Helene. She was not here. A timidity engendered by bewilderment held him motionless. He could not fathom why he had come. How absurd to look for Helene; he had just taken her to her home. Dazedly he frowned at his wrist-watch. It was ten minutes after midnight—that meant nothing, offered no clue.

The place in which he stood was apparently a vast, magnificent lobby or foyer of some grand hotel or club. Try as he might, he could not recall having seen it before. Nor had he ever before suffered streaks of absent-mindedness such as must be afflicting him now to cause him to wander into a strange place without knowing why or whence he came. Throngs of people were swarming through the door by which he had made his impetuous entrance. Once inside, they moved off in all directions, singly and in groups. He could recognize none of them.

Many of these people, to all appearances, were as puzzled as he was. Some had faces limned with pain and horror. Others beamed as though fortified by a mystic faith or secret knowledge. A man jostled him, smiled apologetically, showing white teeth in a broad, brown Polynesian face, and walked away.

Tom stared. Was there a costume ball being staged here, or was this chap, wearing naught save a flower in his hair and

a gay cloth about his loins, a real Marquesan? As suddenly as the contact had been made it was broken. The brown-skinned man disappeared in the milling crowd . . . and what a peculiar-appearing crowd it was! These people were *all* odd. Why, there was a hawk-nosed, bearded man clad in a night-shirt! A woman with terrified, staring eyes stumbled and fell as she tried vainly to free herself from a madhouse straitjacket. Then she, too, was hidden from Tom's view as what appeared to be an entire company of Sepoy soldiers trooped across the foyer. . . . With scarlet, sensual lips parted in a malignant sneer, an evilly beautiful wanton in serpent-green decolleté drew aside her skirts as she passed by an emaciated clergyman who, having taken off his hat and dropped it on the floor, was kneeling beside it, his hands clasped in silent prayer.

As a Twentieth Century young-man-about-town who had been to places and seen things, Tom had to admit that these people and this place were, to say the least, rather bizarre. Yet, being a young modern—one of the generation that is buoyantly journeying through these topsy-turvy days, without faith or fear, and laughing so that it will not weep—he drew himself up, straightened his shoulders, plunged his clenched fists deep into the pockets of his dinner jacket, and asked of no one in particular—

"Well, what's the racket?"

For a moment his well-shaped head was lifted in a bold defiance of everything and anything that might happen next. But only for a moment, after which little beads of cold sweat stood out on his brow. This whole affair didn't make sense. Things were going pretty far wrong when he—Tom Atwell, usually unexcitable—talked to himself. He wished for Helene at his side; with her he might be able to penetrate the thickening mystery of this place.

His will wavering, he allowed himself to be swept slowly along with one of the shifting groups. He shuffled aimlessly forward until blocked by something pressing against his chest. It was—of all things!—a bar, a high wooden counter across which refreshment was being served to all who asked for it. His stiff, white dress-shirt bulged over the mahogany and his foot found a rail. This must be the longest bar in the world, disappearing into the smoky distances on either side of him. Reflected in the mirror behind the bar he saw himself, strained-faced and pale, sandwiched between a huge, raw-boned Nordic who but for his modern seaman's garb might have been a Viking, and an elderly, pot-bellied little satyr in correctly formal and expensively tailored evening attire. The rotund little man's bloodshot eyes shifted in their puffy half-moon paunches under dull drooping lids, to appraise Tom.

GRIMLY determined not to be routed by the growing disquiet in his heart, and with all the nonchalance he could summon, Tom invited the two strangers to drink with him.

"Cheer up," he said with outward calm; "this is probably an advertising stunt of some kind—getting us all in here and not letting us know what it's all about. What are you going to have?"

"Give me rum," the young giant replied, staring straight ahead. "Rum. Sailor's rum, yust like I wass drinking when I fall off de boat. Nobody see me go under. Nobody give a damn. Now I see nobody no more."

"What's the matter with him?" Tom asked, turning to the elderly man.

"Drowned."

"Wha——" Tom started, then seeing

a bartender leaning attentively toward them, said quickly, "Rum for the sailor, brandy for me, and for this gentleman——"

"Champagne," chirped the aged roué. "Why not? It doesn't cost anything here, and this may be my last chance to get it. On the eve of execution it's customary to give the condemned anything his appetite desires."

The three drained their glasses, which were instantly refilled. Ignoring his, Tom ventured cautiously, "I wonder whether or not I heard aright. Did you say that our friend here was *drowned?*"

Setting down his empty glass a second time and signaling to the barman to fill it up again, the old man nodded affirmatively.

"Certainly, he's drowned. Trouble with him is that he isn't quite sure he's dead. Now, I *know* that *I* am. I died as a result of eating and drinking too much and living in a manner which my jolly doctors warned me would kill me." He again drained the glass and seizing the bottle, proceeded to do his own pouring.

"I expected to die long before this," he said as he put down the empty bottle and lifted the brimming glass, "but the event had to wait until I was in the midst of a charming tête-à-tête over a lobster supper with La Gitana——"

"The Spanish dancer?" asked Tom.

"Dancer, yes. Spanish, no. She was born in Omaha, Nebraska. Well, there we were, she and I, feasting in a cozy, private dining-room of the exclusive Shoreland Country Club, when suddenly things became blurred and dim before my eyes. Something seemed to be suffocating me. It pained me cruelly to breathe. She was surprized to hear the death rattle in my throat, but not too shocked to extract twelve one-hundred-dollar bills from my wallet before ringing for the waiter. That's what I call quick thinking." Again he drank, long and deeply.

Tom laughed nervously and without mirth.

"S-a-y," snarled the old man in a tone of shrewd cunning that usually followed his fourth drink, "what are *you* laughing at? You don't seem to be quite sure either."

"About what?" asked Tom, his growing dislike for the old sot causing him to forget, momentarily, the plight they were in.

"You're not sure that you're dead—are you?"

"You, sir," said Tom with forced restraint, "are either drunk or crazy, or both." Bowing coldly, he walked away with all the poise he could muster against the panic in his soul. He wanted to ask some one where and what he was, but feared that he, too, might be regarded as an intoxicated fool.

Again he glanced at his watch. It still stood at ten minutes after midnight, exactly the time he had first found himself in this palace of confusion. He paused before a uniformed page and asked the time.

"There is no time here, sir."

"Oh, isn't there! You're like every one else here, trying to confound me with cryptic remarks. I've a mind to punch your face and report you to the management." Tom's anger was heightened by a creeping fear that perhaps the others were right and he was wrong; that some dire catastrophe had befallen him and was robbing him of his reason. . . .

Crowds still came through the door and milled through the halls. At intervals, large groups would throng into a long, broad corridor, at the far end of which loomed a tall black curtain that might have been of richest velvet. Al-

though it did not lift or draw aside, the throngs surged ever toward it. Those in the fore disappeared into the blackness as though they were walking *through* the curtain.

TOM turned back and eyed the page sharply. The youth was apparently a well-drilled servant, accustomed to remaining courteous at all times. Tom's truculent remark seemed to have passed unheard. Tom hoped that it had, for he wanted to draw some information from some one without betraying his own ignorance and fear.

"Where are they going?" he asked, indicating the groups that rushed toward the curtain.

"They," answered the page, "are obeying the summons, they are answering the call to perquisition."

"What call? I hear nothing."

"Only those whose names are called, hear. When your name is called, you too will hear and will go beyond that curtain."

Tom attempted to chortle cynically. "I suppose you would tell me—if I were to ask you—that they are all—all—er——" He could not bring himself to utter the word.

"Dead," said the page, finishing the sentence. "Yes, sir, they are all dead."

"You too?"

"Yessir."

This was carrying things too far. If the page was also dead, why did not *he* obey the summons, Tom demanded to know.

"I will go," the youth replied, "when my name is called. Some one else will take my post here—come through that door just as I did and stand here answering questions just as I am doing. Not any one, however. You, for instance, could not do it. You do not seem to realize just where we are—if you'll pardon my surmising it."

"Enough, enough!" cried Tom. His air of knowing everything and being impressed by nothing was completely routed. He gripped the other's arm, panic-stricken. "Before I go stark mad, tell me—where and what are we?"

"We are no longer in the land of the living, reconcile yourself to that. We are in the dimension of the dead, awaiting perquisition, an examination upon the result of which will depend our places in eternity. More than that I do not know. I came and took this post just as I would have reported for my regular duties back on earth. It seemed the only thing to do."

"But, man! How can you be so calm about it? You make this condition seem quite simple and natural."

"It is, if you stop to think about it. Things and people are not so *very* different here than in the world we left behind us. Our thoughts, our habits, our subconscious precepts of morals are all carried over this far—that is to say—to this side of the curtain. What is beyond the curtain, I do not know. None that goes there ever comes back.

"But on this side of the curtain"—he extended an arm toward the crowds—"people are much the same as when they were alive. They bring their knowledge, their stupidity, their vices and their virtues, their pleasures and their pains—thus far. That is why you can see here—if you are so minded to see—a dining-salon, concert halls, theaters, chapels and shrines for the devout of all faiths, libraries, prisons, art galleries, gaming-tables, chessboards, gymnasiums, gardens; in fact, everything that absorbed the energies and attention of the living is temporarily brought over. But, as I have said, only this far. You might say, for the want of better description, that things here are

spirit replicas or re-creations of things the newly dead are not yet ready to release from their consciousnesses."

Tom protested at that. "Listen, I stood at a bar over there—no, over there—well, somewhere near here, a real bar; and I had real refreshment."

"No doubt," the page said smilingly, "you found that which you imagined you needed. You do not look to be a man who would wander into one of the libraries or kneel in prayer at one of the shrines. You do not even see them."

"But if, as you say, we can bring part of our lives over this far, why can we not bring friends, relatives? Why is Helene not here with me?"

"You can not bring the living into the dimension of the dead."

"What about you," persisted Tom, half hoping that by talk he could ward off an impending doom; "what did you bring from the land of the living?"

"My work. I was a bellhop in the Aldrich Hotel—working on the night shift and earning my way through Columbia University. I was to get my degree next June—but I was shot and killed. I surprized some bandits who had bound up the night clerk and were drilling the hotel safe. I died on duty—in this uniform."

THE man's simple statement, made in a hopelessly matter-of-fact tone, sapped the last bit of courage from Tom's veins. Then it was true. They were all dead. Suddenly weak, afraid that he was insane and more afraid that he was not, he sank into an armchair. What had happened to him? He tried to catalogue his actions of the day.

It had been a routine Wednesday until four p. m. He had left the office at that early hour to go home and prepare for his "date" with Helene. They had met at six, eaten dinner at Boni's restaurant and afterward attended a performance at the Mercury Theater. Although he could not recall the name of the play, he could recall escorting Helene to her home. They had ridden in a taxicab which he had dismissed upon arriving at her door. He remembered bidding her a lingering good-night in the vestibule of her house and starting to walk home, happier than he had ever been before. She had promised to marry him.

After that—had he reached home? He could not remember!

Terror gripped him as he mentally retraced that homeward stroll. He recalled walking along Lee Street, crossing Third Avenue, Fourth Avenue, Fifth Avenue—Fifth Avenue? Strange, he had no recollection of crossing Fifth Avenue. The next thing he had done, it seemed, was to come into this place through that ever revolving door.

That door! People were still whirling through it. One of them, a man wearing a lounging-robe over pajamas, his face drawn in pain, and a newspaper gripped under his arm, was shoved by some one in the crowd behind him. He stumbled against Tom's chair and in regaining his equilibrium waved his arms. The newspaper dropped into Tom's lap.

He glanced down at it—an early edition of the *Evening Sentinel,* dated Thursday. An item caught his eye for the reason that a name in type has the occult power of focusing the attention of the person named upon itself. The item was short, a minor bit in the gist of the world's news, but to Tom it was a tremendous, awful cataclysm. It read:

FELLED BY VAMPIRE AUTO;
VICTIM NEAR DEATH

Hope waned for the recovery of Thomas L. Atwell when he failed to regain consciousness today, twelve hours after being struck by a hit-and-run automobile. He was run down shortly after midnight while crossing Fifth avenue at Lee street and taken to the Mercy hospital——

Springing to his feet, Tom flung the newspaper from him in a gesture of horror.

"I'm not dead! I'll not die!" he uttered hoarsely. "I want to live! Oh, Helene, where are you?"

He lunged forward and against the incoming crowds, struggled toward the revolving door. The page attempted to detain him.

"There is nothing out there, sir. You'll come back. This is the only place there is, for the present."

Tom shoved him aside, reached the door and whirled through it. Without all was blackness. He plunged on, running over and through an inky fog that enveloped him like a stifling blanket. It hindered the movement of his legs and arms and choked his breath. In the blackness, shapes half solid, half ethereal, wraithy and damp, collided with him. They were drifting toward the door which he could no longer see but which he felt was perilously close behind him. Desperately he struggled onward against a current of invisible force that was pushing him back.

LIKE a swimmer in a sea of night he strained against the current. The muscles of his arms, legs, and torso ached from over-exertion. Sharp pains shot through his head.

At length, after seemingly interminable hours, he was ready to surrender to oblivion. The struggle seemed so futile. Faint, weary, and barely able to move he was, when from somewhere in the dark came a call.

"Tom, dear Tom!"

It sounded from afar—Helene's voice! "Tom——"

Helene's voice, closer now. Vainly he tried to shout in response. All he could utter was a throaty gasp. He could scarcely breathe. Something smote him on the head. Bright, searing flashes of light blinded his eyes. He closed them and moaned in pain. . . .

"Oh, doctor," he heard Helene whisper excitedly, "he opened his eyes. I saw them, I saw them! He's regaining his senses. Look, he's moving! Oh, he'll live. He must live. I know that he will." Several other voices murmured faintly in his ears. They were real, earthly, human voices, voices of *living* people.

With tremendous effort he slowly forced himself to open his eyes again. His lids seemed weighted with lead. Peering through them he grew accustomed to the light which had so startled him. Why, it was just an ordinary 100-watt, electric light globe in the ceiling of a hospital room.

Tom Atwell, swathed in bandages, and prone, turned his eyes from the ceiling light, to look into the anxious, blue-green eyes of Helene, who was kneeling at his bedside. Her worry-stained cheeks broke into a happy, tremulous smile. Tom merely glanced at the other people—a doctor, a nurse, and an intern—and turned again to Helene, looking at her longingly and lovingly.

"Cheer up, sweetheart, I'll live," he said. "It was you, Helene, who saved me. I heard your voice—out there—and just had to come back."

Unmindful of the presence of a now grinning hospital staff, Helene put her tear-stained face against Tom Atwell's wan cheek and wept for joy.

Frankenstein

By MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT SHELLEY

The Story Thus Far

ROBERT WALTON, captain of a ship seeking a passage through the Arctic Ocean, saw a low carriage, fixed on a sledge and drawn by dogs, pass over the ice-field to the north. In it sat a being which had the shape of a man, but apparently of gigantic stature. The next morning, after the ice had broken, he rescued from an ice-field another man, greatly emaciated. Only one of his dogs remained alive, for he had been marooned for some time. The man was Victor Frankenstein, a young scientist, who related to Captain Walton the incredible story of his life and how he came to be on the ice-floe.

Frankenstein had lived in Geneva with his father and his adopted sister, Elizabeth, to whom he was betrothed. His father sent him to school at Ingolstadt with his chum, Henry Clerval. There he progressed in his studies of natural science to such a point that he learned to create life.

Without taking Clerval into his secret, Frankenstein created a monster, eight feet tall and human in appearance, taking his materials from graveyards, slaughterhouses and dissecting-rooms. The monster was so terrible to look upon that Frankenstein fled from it, and the monster escaped.

Abandoned by its creator, the monster made its way to the vicinity of Frankenstein's home, where he murdered Frankenstein's younger brother, William.

Frankenstein met the monster in a hut in the Alps, and there the monster told him how he had learned to talk by observing a peasant family for many months, and how he had changed from a being with good impulses to a malevolent demon because when he revealed himself to the eyes of the peasants by entering their cottage, they had been so horrified by his frightful appearance that they beat him with sticks and drove him away; and all men's hands were raised against the hideous monster.

The monster offered to go to the wilds of South America, away from humankind, if Frankenstein would create a female companion for him, and threatened that if Frankenstein refused, he would destroy not only Frankenstein, but also his family. Horrified, the young

This story began in WEIRD TALES for May.

scientist escaped to England, with his companion, Henry Clerval.

The monster followed, and, infuriated by Frankenstein's refusal to create a companion for him, he murdered Clerval, and threatened to see Frankenstein again on the latter's wedding night. Frankenstein was charged with Clerval's murder, but freed through the intervention of his father, with whom he returned to Geneva.

CHAPTER 22

THE voyage came to an end. We landed and proceeded to Paris. I soon found that I had overtaxed my strength, and that I must repose before I could continue my journey. My father's care and attentions were indefatigable; but he did not know the origin of my sufferings, and sought erroneous methods to remedy the incurable ill. He wished me to seek amusement in society. I abhorred the face of man. Oh, not abhorred! they were my brethren, my fellow beings, and I felt attracted even to the most repulsive among them as to creatures of an angelic nature and celestial mechanism. But I felt that I had no right to share their intercourse. I had unchained an enemy among them, whose joy it was to shed their blood and to revel in their groans. How they would, each and all, abhor me, and hunt me from the world, did they know my unhallowed acts and the crimes which had their source in me!

My father yielded at length to my desire to avoid society, and strove by various arguments to banish my despair. Sometimes he thought that I felt deeply the degradation of being obliged to answer a charge of murder, and he endeavored to prove to me the futility of pride.

"Alas! my father," said I, "how little do you know me. Human beings, their feelings and passions, would indeed be degraded if such a wretch as I felt pride. Justine, poor unhappy Justine, was as innocent as I, and she suffered the same charge; she died for it; and I am the cause of this—I murdered her. William, Justine, and Henry—they all died by my hands."

My father had often, during my imprisonment, heard me make the same assertion; when I thus accused myself he sometimes seemed to desire an explanation, and at others he appeared to consider it as the offspring of delirium, and that, during my illness, some idea of this kind had presented itself to my imagination, the remembrance of which I preserved in my convalescence. I avoided explanation, and maintained a continual silence concerning the wretch I had created. I had a persuasion that I should be supposed mad; and this in itself would for ever have chained my tongue. But, besides, I could not bring myself to disclose a secret which would fill my hearer with consternation, and make fear and unnatural horror the inmates of his breast. I checked, therefore, my impatient thirst for sympathy, and was silent when I would have given the world to have confided the fatal secret. Yet still words like those I have recorded would burst uncontrollably from me. I could offer no explanation of them; but their truth in part relieved the burden of my mysterious wo.

Upon this occasion my father said, with an expression of unbounded wonder, "My dearest Victor, what infatuation is this? My dear son, I entreat you never to make such an assertion again."

"I am not mad," I cried energetically; "the sun and the heavens, who have viewed my operations, can bear witness of my truth. I am the assassin of those most innocent victims; they died by my machinations. A thousand times would I have shed my own blood, drop by drop, to have

saved their lives; but I could not, my father, indeed I could not sacrifice the whole human race."

The conclusion of this speech convinced my father that my ideas were deranged, and he instantly changed the subject of our conversation and endeavored to alter the course of my thoughts. He wished as much as possible to obliterate the memory of the scenes that had taken place in Ireland, and never alluded to them, or suffered me to speak of my misfortunes.

As time passed away I became more calm: misery had her dwelling in my heart, but I no longer talked in the same incoherent manner of my own crimes; sufficient for me was the consciousness of them. By the utmost self-violence, I curbed the imperious voice of wretchedness, which sometimes desired to declare itself to the whole world; and my manners were calmer and more composed than they had ever been since my journey to the sea of ice.

A FEW days before we left Paris on our way to Switzerland, I received the following letter from Elizabeth:

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—It gave me the greatest pleasure to receive a letter from my uncle dated at Paris; you are no longer at a formidable distance, and I may hope to see you in less than a fortnight. My poor cousin, how much you must have suffered! I expect to see you looking even more ill than when you quitted Geneva. This winter has been passed most miserably, tortured as I have been by anxious suspense; yet I hope to see peace in your countenance, and to find that your heart is not totally void of comfort and tranquillity.

"Yet I fear that the same feelings now exist that made you so miserable a year ago, even perhaps augumented by time. I would not disturb you at this period when so many misfortunes weigh upon you; but a conversation that I had with my uncle previous to his departure renders some explanation necessary before we meet.

"Explanation! you may possibly say; what can Elizabeth have to explain! If you really say this, my questions are answered, and all my doubts satisfied. But you are distant from me, and it is possible that you may dread, and yet be pleased with this explanation; and, in a probability of this being the case, I dare not any longer postpone writing what, during your absence, I have often wished to express to you, but have never had the courage to begin.

"You well know, Victor, that our union had been the favorite plan of your parents ever since our infancy. We were told this when young, and taught to look forward to it as an event that would certainly take place. We were affectionate playfellows during childhood, and, I believe, dear and valued friends to one another as we grew older. But as brother and sister often entertain a lively affection towards each other without desiring a more intimate union, may not such also be our case? Tell me, dearest Victor. Answer me, I conjure you, by our mutual happiness, with simple truth—Do you not love another?

"You have travelled; you have spent several years of your life at Ingolstadt; and I confess to you, my friend, that when I saw you last autumn so unhappy, flying to solitude, from the society of every creature, I could not help supposing that you might regret our connection, and believe yourself bound in honor to fulfil the wishes of your parents although they opposed themselves to your inclinations. But this is false reasoning. I confess to you, my friend, that I love you, and that in my airy dreams of futurity you have been my constant friend and companion.

But it is your happiness I desire as well as my own when I declare to you that our marriage would render me eternally miserable unless it were the dictate of your own free choice.

"Even now I weep to think that, borne down as you are by the cruellest misfortunes, you may stifle, by the word *honor*, all hope of that love and happiness which would alone restore you to yourself. I, who have so disinterested an affection for you, may increase your miseries tenfold by being an obstacle to your wishes. Ah! Victor, be assured that your cousin and playmate has too sincere a love for you not to be made miserable by this supposition. Be happy, my friend; and if you obey me in this one request, remain satisfied that nothing on earth will have the power to interrupt my tranquillity.

"Do not let this letter disturb you; do not answer tomorrow, or the next day, or even until you come, if it will give you pain. My uncle will send news of your health; and if I see but one smile on your lips when we meet, occasioned by this or any other exertion of mine, I shall need no other happiness.

"ELIZABETH LAVENZA.

"GENEVA, *May* 18*th*, 17—."

This letter revived in my memory what I had before forgotten, the threat of the fiend—*"I will be with you on your wedding night!"* Such was my sentence, and on that night would the demon employ every art to destroy me and tear me from the glimpse of happiness which promised partly to console my sufferings. On that night he had determined to consummate his crimes by my death. Well, be it so; a deadly struggle would then assuredly take place, in which if he were victorious I should be at peace, and his power over me be at an end. If he were vanquished I should be a free man. Alas! what freedom? such as the peasant enjoys when his family have been massacred before his eyes, his cottage burnt, his lands laid waste, and he is turned adrift, homeless, penniless, and alone, but free. Such would be my liberty except that in my Elizabeth I possessed a treasure; alas! balanced by those horrors of remorse and guilt which would pursue me until death.

Sweet and beloved Elizabeth! I read and re-read her letters and some softened feelings stole into my heart and dared to whisper paradisiacal dreams of love and joy; but the apple was already eaten, and the angel's arm bared to drive me from all hope. Yet I would die to make her happy. If the monster executed his threat, death was inevitable; yet, again, I considered whether my marriage would hasten my fate. My destruction might indeed arrive a few months sooner; but if my torturer should suspect that I postponed it influenced by his menaces he would surely find other, and perhaps more dreadful, means of revenge. He had vowed *to be with me on my wedding-night*, yet he did not consider that threat as binding him to peace in the meantime; for, as if to show me that he was not yet satiated with blood, he had murdered Clerval immediately after the enunciation of his threats. I resolved, therefore, that if my immediate union with my cousin would conduce either to hers or my father's happiness, my adversary's designs against my life should not retard it a single hour.

In this state of mind I wrote to Elizabeth. My letter was calm and affectionate. "I fear, my beloved girl," I said, "little happiness remains for us on earth; yet all that I may one day enjoy is centered in you. Chase away your idle fears; to you alone do I consecrate my life and my endeavors for contentment. I have one secret, Elizabeth, a dreadful one; when revealed to you it will chill your frame with horror, and then, far from being sur-

prized at my misery, you will only wonder that I survived what I have endured. I will confide this tale of misery and terror to you the day after our marriage shall take place; for, my sweet cousin, there must be perfect confidence between us. But until then, I conjure you, do not mention or allude to it. This I most earnestly entreat, and I know you will comply."

In about a week after the arrival of Elizabeth's letter we returned to Geneva. The sweet girl welcomed me with warm affection; yet tears were in her eyes as she beheld my emaciated frame and feverish cheeks. I saw a change in her also. She was thinner and had lost much of that heavenly vivacity that had before charmed me; but her gentleness and soft looks of compassion made her a more fit companion for one blasted and miserable as I was.

The tranquillity which I now enjoyed did not endure. Memory brought madness with it; and when I thought of what had passed a real insanity possessed me; sometimes I was furious and burnt with rage; sometimes low and despondent. I neither spoke nor looked at any one, but sat motionless, bewildered by the multitudes of miseries that overcame me.

Soon after my arrival, my father spoke of my immediate marriage with Elizabeth. I remained silent.

"Have you, then, some other attachment?"

"None on earth. I love Elizabeth, and look forward to our union with delight. Let the day therefore be fixed; and on it I will consecrate myself, in life or death, to the happiness of my cousin."

"My dear Victor, do not speak thus. Heavy misfortunes have befallen us; but let us only cling closer to what remains, and transfer our love for those whom we have lost to those who yet live. Our circle will be small, but bound close by the ties of affection and mutual misfortune. And when time shall have softened your despair, new and dear objects of care will be born to replace those of whom we have been so cruelly deprived."

Such were the lessons of my father. But to me the remembrance of the threat returned: nor can you wonder that, omnipotent as the fiend had yet been in his deeds of blood, I should almost regard him as invincible, and that when he had pronounced the words, "I shall be with you on your wedding-night," I should regard the threatened fate as unavoidable. But death was no evil to me if the loss of Elizabeth were balanced with it; and I therefore, with a contented and even cheerful countenance, agreed with my father that, if my cousin would consent, the ceremony should take place in ten days, and thus put, as I imagined, the seal to my fate.

Great God! if for one instant I had thought what might be the hellish intention of my fiendish adversary, I would rather have banished myself for ever from my native country, and wandered a friendless outcast over the earth, than have consented to this miserable marriage. But, as if possessed of magic powers, the monster had blinded me to his real intentions; and when I thought that I had prepared only my own death, I hastened that of a far dearer victim.

As the period fixed for our marriage drew nearer, whether from cowardice or a prophetic feeling, I felt my heart sink within me. But I concealed my feelings by an appearance of hilarity, that brought smiles and joy to the countenance of my father, but hardly deceived the ever-watchfulness and nicer eye of Elizabeth. She looked forward to our union with placid contentment, not unmingled with

a little fear, which past misfortunes had impressed, that what now appeared certain and tangible happiness might soon dissipate into an airy dream, and leave no trace but deep and everlasting regret.

PREPARATIONS were made for the event; congratulatory visits were received; and all wore a smiling appearance. I shut up, as well as I could, in my own heart the anxiety that preyed there, and entered with seeming earnestness into the plans of my father, although they might only serve as the decorations of my tragedy. Through my father's exertions, a part of the inheritance of Elizabeth had been restored to her by the Austrian government. A small possession on the shores of Como belonged to her. It was agreed that, immediately after our union, we should proceed to Villa Lavenza, and spend our first days of happiness beside the beautiful lake near which it stood.

In the meantime I took every precaution to defend my person in case the fiend should openly attack me. I carried pistols and a dagger constantly about me, and was ever on the watch to prevent artifice; and by those means gained a greater degree of tranquillity. Indeed, as the period approached, the threat appeared more as a delusion, not to be regarded as worthy to disturb my peace, while the happiness I hoped for in my marriage wore a greater appearance of certainty as the day fixed for its solemnization drew near and I heard it continually spoken of as an occurrence which no accident could possibly prevent.

Elizabeth seemed happy; my tranquil demeanor contributed greatly to calm her mind. But on the day that was to fulfil my wishes and my destiny she was melancholy, and a presentiment of evil pervaded her; and perhaps also she thought of the dreadful secret which I had promised to reveal to her on the following day. My father was in the meantime overjoyed, and, in the bustle of the preparation, only recognized in the melancholy of his niece the diffidence of a bride.

After the ceremony was performed a large party assembled at my father's; but it was agreed that Elizabeth and I should commence our journey by water, sleeping that night at Evian, and continuing our voyage on the following day. The day was fair, the wind favorable, all smiled on our nuptial embarkation.

Those were the last moments of my life during which I enjoyed the feeling of happiness. We passed rapidly along: the sun was hot, but we were sheltered from its rays by a kind of canopy, while we enjoyed the beauty of the scene, sometimes on one side of the lake, where we saw Mont Salêve, the pleasant banks of Montalègre, and at a distance, surmounting all, the beautiful Mont Blanc, and the assemblage of snowy mountains that in vain endeavor to emulate her; sometimes coasting the opposite banks, we saw the mighty Jura opposing its dark side to the ambition that would quit its native country, and an almost insurmountable barrier to the invader who should wish to enslave it.

I took the hand of Elizabeth: "You are sorrowful, my love. Ah! if you knew what I have suffered, and what I may yet endure, you would endeavor to let me taste the quiet and freedom from despair that this one day at least permits me to enjoy."

"Be happy, my dear Victor," replied Elizabeth; "there is, I hope, nothing to distress you; and be assured that if a lively joy is not painted in my face, my heart is contented. Something whispers to me not to depend too much on the prospect that is opened before us; but I will not listen to such a sinister voice. Observe how fast we move along, and how the clouds, which sometimes obscure and sometimes

rise above the dome of Mont Blanc, render this scene of beauty still more interesting. Look also at the innumerable fish that are swimming in the clear waters, where we can distinguish every pebble that lies at the bottom. What a divine day! how happy and serene all nature appears!"

Thus Elizabeth endeavored to divert her thoughts and mine from all reflection upon melancholy subjects. But her temper was fluctuating; joy for a few instants shone in her eyes, but it continually gave place to distraction and revery.

The sun sunk lower in the heavens; we passed the river Drance, and observed its path through the chasm of the higher, and the glens of the lower hills. The Alps here come closer to the lake, and we approached the amphitheater of mountains which forms its eastern boundary. The spire of Evian shone under the woods that surrounded it, and the range of mountain above mountain by which it was overhung.

The wind, which had hitherto carried us along with amazing rapidity, sunk at sunset to a light breeze; the soft air just ruffled the water, and caused a pleasant motion among the trees as we approached the shore, from which it wafted the most delightful scent of flowers and hay. The sun sunk beneath the horizon as we landed; and as I touched the shore, I felt those cares and fears revive which soon were to clasp me and cling to me for ever.

CHAPTER 23

It was eight o'clock when we landed; we walked for a short time on the shore enjoying the transitory light, and then retired to the inn and contemplated the lovely scene of waters, woods, and mountains, obscured in darkness, yet still displaying their black outlines.

The wind, which had fallen in the south, now rose with great violence in the west. The moon had reached her summit in the heavens and was beginning to descend; the clouds swept across it swifter than the flight of the vulture and dimmed her rays, while the lake reflected the scene of the busy heavens, rendered still busier by the restless waves that were beginning to rise. Suddenly a heavy storm of rain descended.

I had been calm during the day; but so soon as night obscured the shapes of objects, a thousand fears arose in my mind. I was anxious and watchful, while my right hand grasped a pistol which was hidden in my bosom; every sound terrified me; but I resolved that I would sell my life dearly, and not shrink from the conflict until my own life, or that of my adversary, was extinguished.

Elizabeth observed my agitation for some time in timid and fearful silence; but there was something in my glance which communicated terror to her, and trembling she asked, "What is it that agitates you, my dear Victor? What is it you fear?"

"Oh! peace, peace, my love," replied I; "this night and all will be safe: but this night is dreadful, very dreadful."

I passed an hour in this state of mind, when suddenly I reflected how fearful the combat would be to my wife, and I earnestly entreated her to retire, resolving not to join her until I had obtained some knowledge as to the situation of my enemy.

She left me, and I continued some time walking up and down the passages of the house, and inspecting every corner that might afford a retreat to my adversary. But I discovered no trace of him, and was beginning to conjecture that some fortunate chance had intervened to prevent the execution of his menaces, when sud-

denly I heard a shrill and dreadful scream. It came from the room into which Elizabeth had retired. As I heard it, the whole truth rushed into my mind, my arms dropped, the motion of every muscle and fiber was suspended; I could feel the blood trickling in my veins and tingling in the extremities of my limbs. This state lasted but for an instant; the scream was repeated, and I rushed into the room.

Great God! why did I not then expire? Why am I here to relate the destruction of the best hope and the purest creature of earth? She was there, lifeless and inanimate, thrown across the bed, her head hanging down, and her pale and distorted features half covered by her hair. Everywhere I turn I see the same figure—her bloodless arms and relaxed form flung by the murderer on its bridal bier. Could I behold this and live? Alas! life is obstinate and clings closest where it is most hated. For a moment only did I lose recollection; I fell senseless on the ground.

When I recovered, I found myself surrounded by the people of the inn; their countenances expressed a breathless terror: but the horror of others appeared only as a mockery, a shadow of the feelings that oppressed me. I escaped from them to the room where lay the body of Elizabeth, my love, my wife, so lately living, so dear, so worthy. She had been moved from the posture in which I had first beheld her; and now, as she lay, her head upon her arm, and a handkerchief thrown across her face and neck, I might have supposed her asleep. I rushed towards her, and embraced her with ardor; but the deadly languor and coldness of the limbs told me that what I now held in my arms had ceased to be the Elizabeth whom I had loved and cherished. The murderous mark of the fiend's grasp was on her neck, and the breath had ceased to issue from her lips.

While I still hung over her in the agony of despair, I happened to look up. The windows of the room had before been darkened, and I felt a kind of panic on seeing the pale yellow light of the moon illuminate the chamber. The shutters had been thrown back; and, with a sensation of horror not to be described, I saw at the open window a figure the most hideous and abhorred. A grin was on the face of the monster; he seemed to jeer as with his fiendish finger he pointed towards the corpse of my wife. I rushed towards the window and, drawing a pistol from my bosom, fired; but he eluded me, leaped from his station, and, running with the swiftness of lightning, plunged into the lake.

The report of the pistol brought a crowd into the room. I pointed to the spot where he had disappeared, and we followed the track with boats; nets were cast, but in vain. After passing several hours, we returned hopeless, most of my companions believing it to have been a form conjured up by my fancy. After having landed, they proceeded to search the country, parties going in different directions among the woods and vines.

I attempted to accompany them, and proceeded a short distance from the house; but my head whirled round, my steps were like those of a drunken man, I fell at last in a state of utter exhaustion; a film covered my eyes, and my skin was parched with the heat of fever. In this state I was carried back and placed on a bed, hardly conscious of what had happened; my eyes wandered round the room as if to seek something that I had lost.

After an interval I arose and, as if by instinct, crawled into the room where the corpse of my beloved lay. There were women weeping around—I hung over it, and joined my sad tears to theirs—all this

(Please turn to page 717)

IN A letter to the Eyrie, Mrs. Tom Burnell, of Seattle, writes: "I don't see how any story could be better than *The Devil's Bride,* by Seabury Quinn. What a story! There are so many marvelous tales, though, in WEIRD TALES that it's getting to be a problem to say which I like best. Naturally, I have my favorites. I get plenty for the price. It's the best magazine I read, and I read enough."

Frederick John Walsen, of Denver, writes to the Eyrie: "Congratulations on the splendid August issue of WEIRD TALES. That excellent story by E. Hoffmann Price, *Bride of the Peacock,* easily took first place. It reflected all the glamor of the Orient, in a manner which only Mr. Price can do. Following this fine tale ranked *The Dark Angel,* by Seabury Quinn. This story stole my breath away with its mystery and intrigue. *The Lair of the Star-Spawn,* by August Derleth and Mark Schorer, claims third place. This was truly a marvelous tale. Let's have more by that talented pair of authors."

Harold Dunbar, of Chatham, Massachusetts, writes to the Eyrie: "I have just read *The City of Crawling Death,* by Hugh B. Cave. Its originality and expert craftsmanship give it distinction. I should like to know more about this writer. First we have an outstanding vampire story, then a deliberately cruel tale of macabre horror, and now a story of strange locales and even stranger entities. All of these stories are vividly told, and convincing to the last word. I have read Mr. Cave's stories in a number of different magazines, but he seems to have set a notable pace for himself in WEIRD TALES."

"Here is a suggestion that could go into effect six months from now," writes Lester Anderson, of Hayward, California. "Have you made any plans for the tenth anniversary number of WEIRD TALES, next March? If possible have a Lovecraft story as a cover design. Perhaps a Poe tale, say *The Premature Burial,* as the reprint. Include a Kline story in that issue, for he was, you might say, your first author. I never did get the initial issue of W. T. May publishers, who inevitably print a limited supply of first numbers be chased through Erebus for ever by de Grandin's seven little blue devils!"

Robert Bloch, of Milwaukee, writes to the Eyrie: "I am in favor of reprints from WEIRD TALES' files only. And by all means keep WEIRD TALES weird!—and by that I mean not only weird stories but a weird cover, weird illustrations, and a weird editorial policy that will frown on cheap advertising that is below your standard."

"I have just completed reading the September WEIRD TALES," writes Claude H.

(Please turn to page 714)

Learn WHY YOU STAMMER

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This 279-page Book Tells —Here is a book worth its weight in gold to you if you stammer, stutter or have any speech trouble. It is a book fairly overflowing with the real, definite, tangible, hard-to-get facts about stammering. It is packed with priceless pointers that have never before appeared in print—tells dozens of things you have long wanted to know—tears away the veil of doubt, mystery and guesswork and reveals the plain truth about speech and its defects.

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(Continued from page 712)

Cameron, of Toronto, Canada. "Allow me to congratulate you upon your selection of stories. I believe the latest issue contains better stories than any issue of recent years. My vote for first place goes to G. G. Pendarves for the feature story, *The Altar of Melek Taos.* It was an old idea superbly done. A close second is Arlton Eadie with *The Eye of Truth.* I would like to read more of this writer's work, as he has wonderful descriptive ability and surely can put a story across."

"I have just read *Bride of the Peacock,* by E. Hoffmann Price," writes Delight Merriam, of Oak Glen, Illinois. "Zounds! What a story! I wonder, does the author wear shoes? This tale is the best yet since his *Stranger from Kurdistan.* Let's have more of this refreshing Oriental atmosphere à la Price."

Writes Eduard L. Klein, of Cincinnati: "I am only an occasional reader of WEIRD TALES, but when I do purchase a copy, it is with the assurance that it contains one of Mr. Derleth's quiet but vivid tales. His latest, *The Sheraton Mirror,* particularly pleased me. The ominous atmosphere, then the literally maddening crash at the end is, I think, beyond all your other authors."

"Although I have been a constant reader of WEIRD TALES for seven years and take great interest in the Eyrie," says a letter from Freda Crusius, of St. Louis, "this is the first time I have written to that department. I am glad to see the majority of readers are opposed to serial reprints. I will not bother to repeat their adequate arguments against them, but I do hope that from time to time you will reprint some of the fine stories that have appeared in back issues of WEIRD TALES. I want to comment on the particularly fine story, *The Sheraton Mirror,* by August W. Derleth, which appears in the September issue. I have long been an admirer of Mr. Dereleth."

Elsie Meyer, of East Orange, New Jersey, writes to the Eyrie: "There is only one fault I have to find with WEIRD TALES and that is that it only comes out once a month; so while you are about it, see what you can do to publish it more frequently. I have been a constant reader for a good many years, and have always found it to my utmost satisfaction every month. As I am such an old friend of WEIRD TALES, I feel it my solemn duty to contribute my vote against your publishing serial reprints. But whatever you do, please don't give up your reprint department. I have some very fond memories of *The Burial of the Rats,* by Bram Stoker, and also *The Phantom Farmhouse,* both of which were reprinted by your magazine. Couldn't you please give us some of Bram Stoker's earlier stories? Every time I ask for them at a book store, they say, 'Sorry, out of print.' I can assure you I would greatly appreciate them, and I do not think I am alone in this request."

"I regret only one thing about WEIRD TALES," writes Mrs. Helen Sontag, of Cincinnati, "and that is that it is published so infrequently. I wish it were a weekly publication instead of a monthly one. A month between the copies seems like a year to me. Several days before the new issue is due I haunt my favorite news stand with impatient strides hoping the copies will come early. I agree with those Eyrie writers who want you to discontinue the serials in your reprint department. Let us have a good short story or novelette in place of them. I particularly like vampire stories, and also stories of other planets. May your delightfully different magazine enjoy continued success."

(Please turn to page 716)

Coming Next Month

THROUGH the silence which shrouded the corridors of the royal palace stole twenty furtive figures. Their stealthy feet, bare or cased in soft leather, made no sound. The torches which stood in niches along the hall gleamed red on dagger, sword and keen-edged ax.

"Easy all!" hissed Ascalante. "Stop that cursed loud breathing, whoever it is! The officer of the night-guard has removed most of the sentries from these halls and made the rest drunk, but we must be careful, just the same. Back! Here comes the guard!"

They crowded back behind a cluster of carven pillars, and almost immediately ten giants in black armor swung by at a measured pace. Their faces showed doubt as they glanced at the officer who was leading them away from their post of duty. This officer was rather pale; and as the guard passed the hiding-places of the conspirators, he was seen to wipe the sweat from his brow with a shaky hand. He was young, and this betrayal of a king did not come easy to him.

The guardsmen clanked by and disappeared up the corridor.

"Good!" grinned Ascalante. "Conan sleeps unguarded. Haste! If they catch us killing him, we are undone—but few men will espouse the cause of a dead king."

"Aye, haste!" cried Rinaldo, his blue eyes matching the gleam of the sword he swung above his head. "My blade is thirsty! I hear the gathering of the vultures! On!"

They hurried down the corridor with reckless speed and stopped before a gilded door which bore the royal dragon symbol. . . .

The amazing, the utterly weird and incredible thing that happened to the conspirators as they burst in the door to Conan's bedchamber will be told in the December WEIRD TALES by a master of eery fiction:

The Phoenix on the Sword

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

THE DOOR TO YESTERDAY
By SEABURY QUINN

A gripping tale of a great white snake, weird deaths, and strange racial memories—a sensational triumph of Jules de Grandin.

THE LIVES OF ALFRED KRAMER
By DONALD WANDREI

An astonishing story of atavism, of a throw-back to ancestral lives, with a breath-taking ending—by the author of "The Red Brain."

THE MAN WHO CONQUERED AGE
By EDMOND HAMILTON

An amazing weird-scientific tale—a great scientist, drunk with power, runs amuck in the streets of New York.

THE QUICK AND THE DEAD
By VINCENT STARRETT

An ironic yet intensely human story of a grief-stricken poet, and a body that moved in its coffin.

These are a few of the super-excellent stories that will appear in the next issue. Also, another thrilling installment of *Buccaneers of Venus,* by Otis Adelbert Kline.

December WEIRD TALES Out November 1

(Continued from page 714)

Writes Hazel Portelli, of Detroit: "Before making comments on the contents of the September issue, I wish to say that the cover is very unusual and beautiful, one which I intend to preserve carefully. *The Altar of Melek Taos* is a wonderful story. *The Eye of Truth* is both beautiful and weird, and yet possesses the sound of truth that makes it doubly interesting. After reading *The Ravening Monster,* I shall never want to own another dog, though I have always loved them. I do not care for the story, *Over Time's Threshold,* as I could not understand it at all. Keep up the kind of stories you are now printing, and I'll keep buying."

E. L. Mengshoel, of Minneapolis, writes to the Eyrie: "The majority of your readers being against reprints, I cheerfully join the minority; for, as Henrik Ibsen says in his play, *An Enemy of the People,* 'The majority is always wrong.' But reprint something not so generally known, then. And just now I recall one voice for the *Necronomicon.* Well, why not? It certainly would be interesting to know what those mysteries are about, as they have been referred to quite often in your stories by Lovecraft and others. The best story ever written by Seabury Quinn was, in my judgment, *The Dark Angel,* in the August number, about that fanatical Episcopal minister who impersonated His Satanic Majesty in order to visit the 'Supreme wrath' on 'sinners' against his puritanic egotism. There is nothing preternatural nor impossible in that story. His plot was very plausible, as there are still plenty of superstitious people and still quite a few potential Torquemadas, Calvins and Cotton Mathers at large."

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? The most popular story in the September issue, as shown by your votes and letters to the Eyrie, was Clark Ashton Smith's bizarre fantasy, *The Empire of the Necromancers,* which was closely pressed for first place by G. G. Pendarves' tale of devil-worship, *The Altar of Melek Taos.*

My favorite stories in the November WEIRD TALES are:

Story	Remarks
(1)----------	----------
(2)----------	----------
(3)----------	----------

I do not like the following stories:

(1)---------- Why?----------

(2)---------- ----------

It will help us to know what kind of stories you want in Weird Tales if you will fill out this coupon and mail it to The Eyrie, Weird Tales, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Reader's name and address:

Frankenstein

(Continued from page 711)

time no distinct idea presented itself to my mind; but my thoughts rambled to various subjects, reflecting confusedly on my misfortunes and their cause. I was bewildered in a cloud of wonder and horror. The death of William, the execution of Justine, the murder of Clerval, and lastly of my wife, even at that moment I knew not that my only remaining friends were safe from the malignity of the fiend; my father even now might be writhing under his grasp, and Ernest might be dead at his feet. This idea made me shudder and recalled me to action. I started up and resolved to return to Geneva with all possible speed.

THERE were no horses to be procured, and I must return by the lake; but the wind was unfavorable and the rain fell in torrents. However, it was hardly morning, and I might reasonably hope to arrive by night. I hired men to row, and took an oar myself; for I had always experienced relief from mental torment in bodily exercise. But the overflowing misery I now felt, and the excess of agitation that I endured, rendered me incapable of any exertion.

I threw down the oar, and leaning my head upon my hands gave way to every gloomy idea that arose. If I looked up, I saw the scenes which were familiar to me in my happier time, and which I had contemplated but the day before in the company of her who was now but a shadow and a recollection. Tears streamed from my eyes. The rain had ceased for a moment, and I saw the fish play in the waters as they had done a few hours before; they had then been observed by Elizabeth. Nothing is so painful to the human mind as a great and sudden

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change. The sun might shine or the clouds might lower: but nothing could appear to me as it had done the day before. A fiend had snatched from me every hope of future happiness: no creature had ever been so miserable as I was; so frightful an event is single in the history of man.

But why should I dwell upon the incidents that followed this last overwhelming event? Mine has been a tale of horrors; I have reached their *acme*, and what I must now relate can but be tedious to you. Know that, one by one, my friends were snatched away; I was left desolate. My own strength is exhausted; and I must tell, in a few words, what remains of my hideous narration.

I arrived at Geneva. My father and Ernest yet lived; but the former sunk under the tidings that I bore. I see him now, excellent and venerable old man! his eyes wandered in vacancy, for they had lost their charm and their delight — his Elizabeth, his more than daughter, whom he doted on with all that affection which a man feels, who in the decline of life, having few affections, clings more earnestly to those that remain. Cursed, cursed be the fiend that brought misery on his gray hairs, and doomed him to waste in wretchedness! He could not live under the horrors that were accumulated around him; the springs of existence suddenly gave way: he was unable to rise from his bed, and in a few days he died in my arms.

What then became of me? I know not; I lost sensation, and chains and darkness were the only objects that pressed upon me. Sometimes, indeed, I dreamt that I wandered in flowery meadows and pleasant vales with the friends of my youth; but I awoke, and found myself in a dungeon. Melancholy followed, but by degrees I gained a clear conception of my miseries and situation, and was then released from my prison. For they had called me mad; and during many months, as I understood, a solitary cell had been my habitation.

LIBERTY, however, had been an useless gift to me had I not, as I awakened to reason, at the same time awakened to revenge. As the memory of past misfortunes pressed upon me, I began to reflect on their cause—the monster whom I had created, the miserable demon whom I had sent abroad into the world for my destruction. I was possessed by a maddening rage when I thought of him, and desired and ardently prayed that I might have him within my grasp to wreak a great and signal revenge on his cursed head.

Nor did my hate long confine itself to useless wishes; I began to reflect on the best means of securing him; and for this purpose, about a month after my release, I repaired to a criminal judge in the town, and told him that I had an accusation to make; that I knew the destroyer of my family; and that I required him to exert his whole authority for the apprehension of the murderer.

The magistrate listened to me with attention and kindness:—"Be assured, sir," said he, "no pains or exertions on my part shall be spared to discover the villain."

"I thank you," replied I; "listen, therefore, to the deposition that I have to make. It is indeed a tale so strange that I should fear you would not credit it were there not something in truth which, however wonderful, forces conviction. The story is too connnected to be mistaken for a dream, and I have no motive for falsehood."

My manner, as I thus addressed him, was impressive but calm; I had formed in my own heart a resolution to pursue my

destroyer to death; and this purpose quieted my agony, and for an interval reconciled me to life. I now related my history, briefly, but with firmness and precision, marking the dates with accuracy, and never deviating into invective or exclamation.

The magistrate appeared at first perfectly incredulous, but as I continued he became more attentive and interested; I saw him sometimes shudder with horror, at others a lively surprize, unmingled with disbelief, was painted on his countenance.

When I had concluded my narration, I said, "This is the being whom I accuse, and for whose seizure and punishment I call upon you to exert your whole power. It is your duty as a magistrate, and I believe and hope that your feelings as a man will not revolt from the execution of those functions on this occasion."

This address caused a considerable change in the physiognomy of my own auditor. He had heard my story with that half kind of belief that is given to a tale of spirits and supernatural events; but when he was called upon to act officially in consequence, the whole tide of his incredulity returned. He, however, answered mildly, "I would willingly afford you every aid in your pursuit; but the creature of whom you speak appears to have powers which would put all my exertions to defiance. Who can follow an animal which can traverse the sea of ice, and inhabit caves and dens where no man would venture to intrude? Besides, some months have elapsed since the commission of his crimes, and no one can conjecture to what place he has wandered, or what region he may now inhabit."

"I do not doubt that he hovers near the spot which I inhabit; and if he has indeed taken refuge in the Alps, he may be hunted like the chamois, and destroyed as

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a beast of prey. But I perceive your thoughts: you do not credit my narrative, and do not intend to pursue my enemy with the punishment which is his desert."

As I spoke, rage sparkled in my eyes; the magistrate was intimidated:—"You are mistaken," said he, "I will exert myself; and if it is in my power to seize the monster, be assured that he shall suffer punishment proportionate to his crimes. But I fear, from what you have yourself described to be his properties, that this will prove impracticable; and thus, while every proper measure is pursued, you should make up your mind to disappointment."

"That can not be; but all that I can say will be of little avail. My revenge is of no moment to you; yet, while I allow it to be a vice, I confess that it is the devouring and only passion of my soul. My rage is unspeakable when I reflect that the murderer, whom I have turned loose upon society, still exists. You refuse my just demand: I have but one resource; and I devote myself, either in my life or death, to his destruction."

I trembled with excess of agitation as I said this; there was a frenzy in my manner and something, I doubt not, of that haughty fierceness which the martyrs of old are said to have possessed. But to a Genevan magistrate, whose mind was occupied by far other ideas than those of devotion and heroism, this elevation of mind had much the appearance of madness. He endeavored to soothe me as a nurse does a child, and reverted to my tale as the effects of delirium.

"Man," I cried, "how ignorant art thou in thy pride of wisdom! Cease; you know not what it is you say."

I broke from the house angry and disturbed, and retired to meditate on some other mode of action.

(To be concluded next month)

W. T.—9

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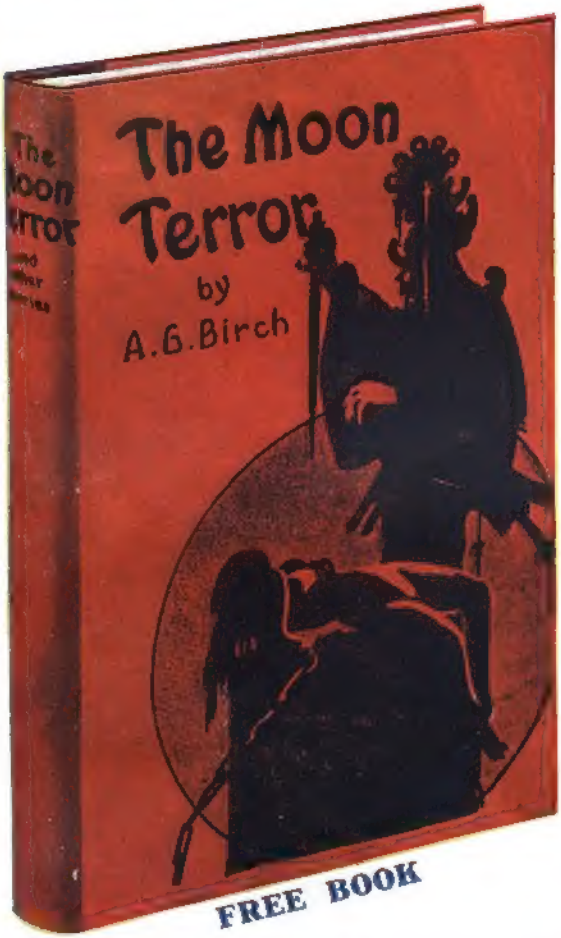

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